## **Module 1: Manage Myself**

[Habit 1: Optimize my brain](#_1r8np72bixzt)

* [Skill 1: Sharpen focus](#_d01v7qehvuz) cognitive capacity
* [Skill 2: Get unstuck (insight)](#_wkedileqj52l) self only
* [Skill 3: Challenge assumptions (bias)](#_s0mlz9mfz625) self only

[Habit 2: Regulate emotions](#_j8r7l2bx8o5m)

* [Skill 1: Understand emotions (Toward and away, 3 levels)](#_ijys7zwqaw61) Label 3 levels of threat
* [Skill 2: Manage distractions (braking system, minimize braking system, label)](#_yy4quucrrpc6) Label with feeling words
* [Skill 3: Shift perspective (reappraisal)](#_yyftspd571ib)

[Habit 3: Sustain good thinking](#_llxkm76yyyhn)

* [Skill 1: Know my drivers (Light scarf) (SCARF assessment)](#_pe6mzbv1h0t1)
* [Skill 2: Get more resilient (Healthy Mind Platter)](#_cpqht11p0wva)
* [Skill 3: Deepen my growth mindset](#_lzok4wrsh467)self

## **Module 2: Mobilize Others**

[Habit 1: Connect efficiently](#_hcj1se6wi66s)

* [Skill 1: Tune in (empathy & influence)](#_wfqur0wrzb3) Direct experience
* [Skill 2: Ensure shared understanding](#_f1gjttd3vupq) (SSG, ~~stories, authenticity~~) SSG only
* [Skill 3: Accelerate insights](#_h4zoj26nt2h8) (TAPS)

[Habit 2: Set the right course](#_gshsarlb1ugc)

* [Skill 1: Personalize interactions](#_8agu5f9zeb2m) SCARF
* [Skill 2: Set great goals](#_5gt18bg1fx35) Choose Your Focus
* [Skill 3: Delegate and let go](#_at1nap9fstm8) Autonomy/certainty balance

[Habit 3: Inspire great work](#_6xty9zwnqo4g)

* [Skill 1: Make feedback the norm](#_a360h849jrla) feedback culture, ask for feedback
* [Skill 2: Maintain momentum](#_ckmkxx85dwdh) Check-ins
* [Skill 3: Bridge performance gaps](#_2ajgwlf47zrc) underperformance, giving feedback

## **Module 3: Drive Results**

[Habit 1: Make it safe](#_dpaxw3mfinn8)

* [Skill 1: Foster collaboration](#_2xfp9z7gqlu) psych safety, SCARF, empathy, shared goals, in group.
* [Skill 2: Optimally include (inc. parallel processing)](#_nume6jld4vql) inclusive meetings
* [Skill 3: Enable healthy debate](#_w3amhbsdsg2g) (affirm warmly, challenge SCARF, SEEDS, psych safety)

[Habit 2: Solve problems faster](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NZddCGoDpiyJbKJSF96XFQAuv6emVKjdw0w3hGG-zkc/edit#heading=h.ui5j81rtupap)

* [Skill 1: Improve team decisions (CREATE)](#_r2btubl1t7xa) insights, brainstorming, decision making
* [Skill 2: Check for bias](#_fq2427dm87zq) (team level, problem solving focus)
* [Skill 3: Own the outcomes](#_6x4mjm7q5fkw) (~~chunking, insight, check-ins~~) Learn from mistakes, accountability, outcomes focus.

[Habit 3: Stay agile](#_cldyjbvmkf3g)

* [Skill 1: Build the right routines](#_ty6hglu25nvp) (FOCUS) - cognitive capacity self and team level
* [Skill 2: Smooth out conflict](#_xqg131ojjura) (CALM)
* [Skill 3: Thrive through change](#_zapfs3jc822) (~~scarf, insight, accountability, CYF, influence~~) SCARF signals, growth mindset for others

| **NILES content** | |
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| **Intro to LEAD** About the journey ahead Welcome to LEAD: The Neuroscience of Effective Management. Whether you’re a new or experienced manager, LEAD will help you manage people even more effectively.  The LEAD journey is based on over 20 years of brain-based research that’s already helped millions of managers be more effective by understanding their own and other’s brains. The journey is divided into three modules: manage myself, mobilize others, and drive results. Research shows that the most effective managers are clear about performance but generous in how they help their people get there. As a result, LEAD is founded on principles such as growth mindset and psychological safety, balanced by powerful goal setting and accountability tools.  In Module 1, manage myself, you’ll learn skills for getting the most out of your brain, including how to juggle lots of information more easily and how to tap into more insights for solving complex problems. You’ll also learn how to manage your emotions more effectively and how to design your work-life balance to optimize the energy you need to think and manage well.  In Module 2, mobilize others, you’ll learn how to communicate more effectively and how to bring others to their own insights faster. You’ll explore new ways of setting achievable goals and maintaining momentum and a fresh approach to creating better feedback loops.  In Module 3, drive results, you’ll learn how to create an environment where everyone wants to perform at their best, speak up, and challenge each other safely. You’ll discover how to move teams through difficult decisions even faster while mitigating bias and ensuring accountability. And finally, the journey ends with how to face road bumps and plan for the ongoing success of your team.  Each of the three modules contain three habits, each of which contain three skills, for a journey that provides you with a total of 27 new skills. Designed in a way that leverages how we learn best, skills are developed one at a time, with roughly 15 minutes of content devoted to each. So, if you’re going through LEAD over three months, you’ll spend about 30 minutes a week on the journey, building two skills a week. Or, if your goal is to go through LEAD in six months, it’s 15 minutes each week. If this sounds like a lot, remember you only have to focus on doing one or two bites of learning each week. Like when you start a good book, don’t try to read the entire outline at the beginning. Dip in, get started, and find a good rhythm that works for you. How you’ll learn To learn each skill, you’ll start with a story about one of five characters struggling with a specific skill, such as juggling lots of information. You’ll then learn about the deeper science of why this skill is important, why it’s hard, and how to do it well. You can choose to dig into fascinating neuroscience and other research that explains step-by-step what’s going on in the human brain as it relates to this skill. As you explore this research, you’ll interact with other managers in your cohort, sharing ideas and insights, responding to each other's thoughts, and engaging in other interactive activities. AI embedded in the program will help summarize and generate themes across the cohort, amplifying what everyone learns from each other. Practice scenarios, found in many of the skills, are built by AI based on your industry, role, and skill level. Finally, a dedicated Cohort Coach supports the conversation and process as you progress, helping turn the interactions into useful insights.  Toward the end of each 15-minute module, there is an opportunity to share with others any actions you plan to try doing differently. Guides and practice tools are also available, giving step-by-step suggestions for specific challenges, such as how to delegate well and how to approach difficult conversations. Each skill then closes with a retake of the story from the start, this time with the manager approaching it with the new skill and getting it right.  At the end of each large module, such as Managing Yourself, you’ll have the opportunity to spend an hour on a platform such as Zoom, in real time with others in your cohort, going through a Habit Activation Lab. Here, you’ll have a chance to further embed the three main habits from that module through a series of powerful real-time exercises with peers. How to get the most from this experience We’re often asked how long it takes for a habit to form. The answer: It depends on how much attention you give it. You learn a language really fast if you live in a country where it’s predominantly spoken because your attention is constantly forced to practice that skill while interacting with others. Similarly, if you’re learning new ideas while interacting with others at the same time, you pay closer attention to these new ideas day to day. You also encode the information automatically and more deeply because you’re learning with others as the brain naturally stores social information more easily and deeply. These are just some of the benefits of social learning. All of this is a long way of saying, you’ll get the most out of LEAD by actively engaging with other participants and sharing what you’ve learned with people around you as you learn it.  You can ask questions of the Cohort Coach anytime digitally or set up a brief real-time interaction if you’re stuck. You can also explore further with the AI coach embedded within the platform. Finally, you can use the platform to dig into any specific challenge at any time by searching for specific content. The Insight - Action - Habit pathway The goal of the LEAD journey is for you to build new habits, which become automatic ways you work as a manager. The way to do this is spaced out, over time, one skill at a time. Research suggests that having strong insights, and then taking action based on that insight, is one of the most effective ways of creating personal change. So, across the journey, we have designed everything to maximize the chances and the intensity of insights you have. Insights release a slew of energy, so when you have one, it’s best to act on it right away and share it with others. Start the journey by seeing where you are now Let’s kick off the journey with a simple self-assessment of how you think you are doing across the three modules and nine habits.  *Manage myself:*  How would you rate your ability to focus in any situation, find breakthrough ideas easily, manage your emotions, and maintain resilience?  Give yourself a rating out of 10. This is for your own reflection, and it won’t be shared with others.  *Mobilize others:*  How would you rate your ability to be understood by others, help people set stretch goals, maintain the momentum of others, and provide high-quality feedback along the way?  Give yourself a rating out of 10. This is for your own reflection, and it won’t be shared with others.  *Drive results:*  How would you rate your ability to create an environment where everyone speaks up and challenges each other, help teams move quickly through difficult decisions and make sure things really happen, remove bias when it happens, and keep teams operating at optimal levels?  Give yourself a rating out of 10. This is for your own reflection, and it won’t be shared with others.  What do you notice about your three ratings? Where do you need to put the most focus going forward with LEAD?  With this assessment in mind, let’s set some personal goals. What do you hope to accomplish after you’re done with LEAD? Pick three specific outcomes you’d like to achieve. Note that these will be shared with other participants within your cohort via the platform.  Goal 1:  Goal 2:  Goal 3:  That’s plenty for now, let’s get started with the journey. | |
| **(MODULE 1- Manage Myself)****Habit 1: Optimize my brain** Skill 1: Sharpen focus (F) Michelle Utility (African American) 1 Customer service  \*Michelle is a new manager in customer service at this power company  (Supporting: Chayton is on this team as her field manager)  Michelle is a new manager of a team of customer service representatives at a power company. She’s one month into the role and is slowly adjusting to all the changes. When she was an individual contributor, she never imagined being a manager would involve so much more to think about. Most days, she wakes up excited about her new position. But after just a few hours of emails, meetings, and big decisions, she feels mentally drained and spends much of the afternoon easily distracted and unproductive. Michelle knows she gets more done in her first hour at work than the rest of the day. She’s annoyed that after lunch, she can’t seem to handle the new volume of information she receives as a manager and wonders how she will cope. This thought distracts her so much that she loses her place in a document she’s working on, and her mind goes off on a tangent for 30 minutes. And it’s only Monday. She then begins to worry about her new boss noticing her lack of focus, which distracts her even more. The situation only seems to get worse as the week goes on. What can she do differently?  Research  We struggle to process the amount of information deluging us each day. The average person receives 121 emails a day, and most websites contain more information than our not-so-distant ancestors processed in their lifetimes. In fact, our brain’s cognitive capacity can only process about three to four concrete bits of new information at a time. Michelle doesn’t realize that it’s perfectly natural to get overwhelmed, so instead of finding strategies to work around this, she’s making the overwhelm worse by stressing about it.  ACTIVITY 1:  How much “information overload” do you experience on an average day?  None. I get through every email and decision I want to.  Slight overload. I don’t get through everything.  Reasonable overload most days. It’s manageable but still a lot.  I need a few new strategies here.  What did you just ask me?  While it’s hard for anyone to accurately process everything around us these days, when you become a manager, the amount of new information you need to process spikes massively. To help manage this, people need to develop specific habits to stay focused in the face of information overload.  In contrast to most goal-focused tasks that require our attention, we can walk, talk, or drive for hours on end because these processes have become habits, and are driven by largely unconscious mechanisms. Driving, for example, uses brain networks such as the basal ganglia, which is primarily responsible for habitual motor control. That’s why an experienced driver can largely wander off mentally or think about a big meeting tomorrow while still staying on the road.  ACTIVITY 2:  List two activities you can do without paying much attention at all, other than driving.  (anonymous word cloud)  Yet, our conscious mind that we use to do goal-focused work has a capacity issue. For example, when we try to do difficult math, we grind to a halt fairly quickly. That’s because making decisions, solving problems, recalling ideas, memorizing something, or trying to maintain self-control are all conscious activities that involve intense activation of the prefrontal cortex.  The prefrontal cortex is a brain network responsible for many things, including holding information in mind and then doing something with it — what’s known as “working memory.” This network has a limited capacity to consciously process information, and it takes a lot of cognitive resources to stay engaged. When you’re trying to focus, this is the network you depend on. And as you surely have noticed, focus itself is a valuable but limited resource, so when you’re overloaded with information, this gets more difficult to do.  ACTIVITY 3:  How long can you focus on a difficult mental task before needing a short break?  10 minutes  20 minutes  60 minutes  90 minutes or more  To help sharpen your focus, let’s start by understanding your brain’s capacity limitations. Think of the prefrontal cortex as a stage in a small theater. Not only is it small, but it also requires a lot of energy to keep lit. Furthermore, if we put too many actors on stage, it becomes crowded. The actors run into each other, and the storyline falls apart.  The key to increasing our cognitive capacity is to reduce the load, or effort, used by this network. We can do this by:  Externalizing information (hold information outside your head by putting it on screen, on paper, or on a whiteboard)  Simplifying ideas (focusing on their essence, removing unnecessary details)  Chunking information into groups (ideally into groups of three, which is the most fluent or easy to process)  Prioritizing information (so your brain can process ideas in a certain order)  In short, we want to use our prefrontal cortex to process information instead of trying to store a lot of it all at once. So try to hold as little information as possible, for as briefly as possible, and think about it in a certain sequence.  ACTIVITY 4:  Re-order these cognitive activities in order of how often you do them:  Externalize  Simplify  Chunk  Prioritize  Which one of these would be most helpful to practice more?  Externalize  Simplify  Chunk  Prioritize  Actions to choose from:  If I start to feel overwhelmed by how much I’m trying to hold in my mind, I’ll write things down so I can process information instead of storing it.  If I start to feel overwhelmed by the complexity of ideas, I’ll simplify the information down to its essence.  If I find a set of information confusing, I’ll try to chunk it into smaller subsets of ideas.  If I start to feel overwhelmed by everything I need to get done, I’ll write down and then prioritize all the actions I’m trying to take.  Pick one of these to try for the next few days or week and share it with your cohort.  Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle is a new manager of a team of customer service representatives at a power company. She used to get mentally depleted by 11 a.m., but she now uses some new practices to help stay focused. She’s started using one of her office walls as a place to store information on sticky notes. When a team member asks her a complex question, she helps them simplify the issue to the core and is careful to break it into chunks. She prioritizes the most important tasks first thing in the morning, when her mind is at its sharpest. And she takes mental breaks each hour for 10 minutes, going to the water cooler and stretching. With these practices, she’s able to stay focused throughout the day more often.  **Content notes:**  High-level overview Skill 1: Sharpen focus (cognitive capacity) merges the science of cognitive capacity with practical strategies, offering managers a powerful toolkit to navigate the challenges of modern work environments marked by stress and digital overload. It's designed to help leaders understand the limits of cognitive capacity and learn how to optimize it for themselves. Managers will gain the ability to work effectively with multiple ideas and overwhelming amounts of information, directing focus towards what's most important. Key features include structuring the workday around cognitive peaks, and attention management. This comprehensive approach equips managers with the tools to prioritize tasks efficiently, manage energy, and create a productive, well-balanced work environment.    **Theory**   What is cognitive capacity?  Cognitive capacity, according to neuroscience, is the availability of cognitive and attentional resources at any given moment. The brain’s ‘executive functions’ such as planning, attention, memory, self-control, and focus are central to our cognitive and attentional capacities (Beaty, Benedek, Barry Kaufman & Silvia, 2015). And, it is important to note that the human cognitive capacity to process information is finite.There are limits to how long we can focus our undivided attention on a task or how many different pieces of information we can hold in mind before we make mistakes.  Citation: Beaty, R. E., Benedek, M., Kaufman, S. B., & Silvia, P. J. (2015). Default and executive network coupling supports creative idea production. Scientific reports, 5(1), 1-14.  Cognitive capacity is related to brain activity in the prefrontal cortex, or PFC.  · The PFC is responsible for controlling executive functions such as switching between mental tasks, monitoring and updating information held in working memory, and suppressing responses in favor of others.  · Its activity is vital in the work setting for planning, problem-solving, and reasoning.  · Executive functions require and consume considerable resources to manage our motivation, self control or attention.  · The PFC is a limited resource, therefore, there are limits to how long we can hold information in mind or focus attention on a given task.  Citation:  Cornish D. & Dukette, D., 2009. The essential 20: Twenty components of an excellent health care team. Dorrance Publishing.  Sweller, J. (2016). Working memory, long-term memory, and instructional design. Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 5(4), 360-367.  Human working memory has a capacity of roughly seven items of information (Miller, 1956). However, processing information, as opposed to just holding information in our working memory, requires cognitive effort, thus lowering the amount of information we can actually process to about 2-3 pieces of information.  · It has been suggested that the human brain can only process two to three pieces of new information at a time (Sweller et al., 1998).  · Past these constraints, we find it harder to make decisions, learn, and communicate effectively (Drew , Vo & Wolfe, 2013).  However, we CAN manage cognitive capacity to make information processing easier.  Citations  Miller, G. A. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information. Psychological Review, 63(2), 81–97. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0043158  Drew, T., Vo, M. L.-H., & Wolfe, J. M. (2013). The invisible gorilla strikes again: Sustained inattentional blindness in expert observers. Psychological Science, 24(9), 1848–1853.  Sweller, J., Van Merrienboer, J. J., & Paas, F. G. (1998). Cognitive architecture and instructional design. Educational psychology review, 10(3), 251-296.  The human brain operates in two main modes - conscious and nonconscious - to accommodate and facilitate smooth and efficient processing of information and tasks at all times. Let’s review the prefrontal cortex, or PFC, as we commonly refer to it in short. This is where conscious processing takes place. If you put your hand horizontally on your forehead, you are covering your PFC. It’s sometimes referred to as the executive center. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for high-level thinking such as:   * Understanding—your PFC is working to understand what I’m saying right now. * Evaluating—right now you might be deciding whether this information is useful and relevant to you. * Inhibiting— the ventrolateral PFC is the specific part of the PFC that controls impulses like thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. For example, you might be using the PFC right now to stop thinking about the other work you need to do so you can focus on this conversation. * Working memory - The PFC supports working memory which is the cognitive system that temporarily allows us to hold multiple, and often varied, pieces of information at once. * Allocating attention—the PFC helps you direct your focus and prioritize.   What are the biological limitations of the PFC?   * Energy intensive – The PFC consumes a lot of the brain’s energy resources – glucose, oxygen and ketones. * It works a bit like a battery in that it needs breaks to recharge. Think about how you feel after doing highly creative thinking, or making a lot of decisions in a row, or learning something new. * Very small. While we can hold up to 7 pieces of new information in our working memory, we can only actively process 2-3 of those pieces at any moment before we are prone to errors. * Serial processor. You can only think about one thing at a time. Multitasking is only possible when at least one activity is habitual—for example we can walk and talk at the same time. * Fussy – referred to by neuroscientist Amy Arnsten (Yale University) as the "Goldilocks of the brain" because it needs to have just the right neurochemical balance to operate effectively. Too little stimulation and we are bored. Too much stimulation and the PFC goes into overwhelm and becomes much less effective. * Easily distracted. Distractions can be internal, such as hunger, thirst, or your own thoughts. We also find it hard to focus with external distractions like noise, or other people, and digital devices.   Often when we approach our work, we try to accomplish as much as possible as quickly as we can. This strategy relies on a common misconception we unconsciously hold — when we are awake, our brain is like a computer that we plug into an outlet for unlimited power. In reality, it’s closer to a battery with limited energy resources.    The human brain operates in two main modes: conscious and nonconscious — to enable smooth and efficient processing of information and tasks at all times.  Conscious processing is slow and deliberate.  Most of our conscious choices and deliberations are categorized as “executive functions,” and they are performed and facilitated by the prefrontal cortex (PFC). The PFC is just one part of the overall cortex (an outer layer composed of neuron cells that is a tenth of an inch thick and covers the brain like a sheet). The PFC is responsible for high-level thinking processes such as deciding, understanding, evaluating, stopping actions, and allocating attention. It supports working memory (Cowan, 2008), which is the cognitive system that temporarily allows us to hold multiple, and often varied, pieces of information in mind at once. This is why we often need to look at a phone number two or three times before putting it into our phones.  The PFC generally processes information and tasks serially (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2012). This means that we struggle to perform more than one similar cognitive process at a time without impairing performance (Inzlicht, Berkman, Elkins-Brown, & Inzlicht, 2015). For example, we cannot read with comprehension and count at the same time (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2012). The PFC is also fussy in that it needs just the right neurochemistry to operate at its best. Too little stimulation will leave us disengaged or bored; too much stimulation stresses the system, making us feel overwhelmed (Al-Hashimi, Zanto & Gazzaley, 2015).  Nonconscious processing: Fast and instinctual  By contrast, another part of the brain — the basal ganglia — governs all of our hardwired information and habits, including walking, talking, the way we type on a computer, and the route we take to work  (Duhigg, 2012). In contrast to when the PFC is very active, this mode of functioning is highly automated and systematized. The basal ganglia require minimal effort to operate and are not easily distracted. Unlike the PFC, they can multitask very efficiently.  Another way to think about nonconscious processing is to reflect on all the things we can do without really being able to explain them. Ask someone to describe how to walk, and they will struggle to describe the actual process, even if they can show it to you without thinking. We rely on our nonconscious processing for all of our habitual behavior, from breathing to riding a bicycle to helping ourselves to seconds at dinner.  While the PFC is critical to managing our day-to-day lives, it is by no means a machine; it comes with its own set of limitations to peak performance (Arnsten & Li, 2005; Vjayraghavan, Wang, Birnbaum, Williams, & Arnsten, 2007). For example, despite making up only a small percentage of the brain’s overall size, the PFC consumes a lot of the brain’s energy resources — glucose, oxygen, ketones — to enable us to pay attention, choose between options, or initiate a response. This high energy cost compels the brain to, instead, rely on nonconscious processing in an effort to save on resources.  Since the PFC works similarly to a battery, it is important for us to take breaks to allow the PFC to “recharge.” Taking short, frequent breaks helps to restore those resources and improves productivity.  Nonconscious processing also often takes the reins because we are constantly bombarded with distractions, from both the external world and within our own minds. These distractions are continually competing  for our attention, requiring us to exercise a skill known as “inhibitory control” (see e.g., Lieberman, 2009). Making use of this skill takes a great deal of energy, and it saps our resources for the essential functions of deciding, understanding, memorizing, inhibiting, and recalling.  Ultimately, if we want our PFC to work at its best, we can help it by taking periodic breaks and minimizing distractions while we engage in tasks.  “I feel overwhelmed” … “I need to be more organized” … “I can’t seem to focus …” These are common challenges that people experience in the workplace. Conventional wisdom might call this area of development “time management.” At the NeuroLeadership Institute, we call it “attention management.” The key is to help people get better access to both their prefrontal cortex and to their nonconscious processing. This allows people to be more creative, solve problems, think strategically, and learn new things. As their bandwidth improves, their work days start to feel more manageable.  The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is a limited resource. It is small but resource-hungry, so it is quickly depleted. It can only do one task at a time, and yet it is easily distracted from the task we are trying to do. And finally, it is fussy, needing the right balance of dopamine and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) to function at its peak. Too few of these chemicals,and we experience fatigue or boredom; too much, and the system is stressed  and out of control. When conditions are “just right” we attain peak performance. For this reason, the PFC has been referred to as “The Goldilocks of the brain” (Arnsten, 2007). By respecting the limitations of the PFC, we can be more efficient, productive, and focused.  When we multitask we are in fact switching rapidly between two single points of focus. Evidence suggests that people who practice multitasking actually train their brains to have a harder time focusing and remembering.  Citations  Ophir, E., Nass, C., & Wagner, A. (2009). Cognitive control in media multitaskers. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106, (7), 15583-15587. (See: AGES Paper NLI Journal 5)  Three degrees of cognitive difficulty  We can divide tasks into three degrees of cognitive difficulty:  Level 1 tasks don’t require much thinking or effort, and use of the PFC is minimal. They tend to utilize concepts or skills that are familiar to us. An example might be responding to an email request for information that you can easily bring to mind. The answer would be something straightforward, like the location of a document or the correct procedure for filing expenses. Current projects often fall into this “easy” category because information about them is stored in our short-term memory and is highly accessible.  Level 2 tasks represent the next degree of difficulty. An example could be writing an email to a colleague summarizing key points from a meeting they missed. Let’s say you only took notes about the aspects of the meeting relevant to you, but now you need to consider what might have been relevant to your colleague. To complete this task, you need to think about the recent past, engaging your working memory, and you need to navigate a certain level of ambiguity: Which key points does your colleague need to know?  Level 3 tasks deplete our cognitive resources the fastest. Think of activities that “start from a blank page.” They may involve imagining the future, creating, conceptualizing, abstract thinking, and/or a high degree of uncertainty. For example, reimagining the organizational structure for a company or writing an article for publication.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * Is it possible to improve my cognitive capacity? * Why do our brain’s get so easily overwhelmed? * How long should I do focus-work before I need a break?  **Application** How do I work with the limitations of my PFC?   * Break projects into chunks. * We have a lot of neural real estate dedicated to visuals – so use visuals to increase clarity, e.g., color-coding, pictures, maps. * Identify three priorities for the day, week, month. Prioritizing is cognitively taxing because we have to make decisions and think about the future. So we need to prioritize prioritizing. * Schedule tasks according to your cognitive peaks and troughs. * Maintain your levels of dopamine (interest) by stretching yourself and introducing novelty. * Maximize your physical comfort (e.g., ergonomics, temperature). * Prioritize nutrition and hydration. * Take regular breaks during the day. * Build the habit of doing one thing at a time — avoid multitasking. * Our brains are very distracted by email reminders. Try turning them off, and processing your emails at specific times of day, say, 3 times a day. * Move distracting thoughts and ideas on to paper and set aside regular blocks of time to “process” them and work out next actions. * Minimize distractions in your environment. * Consider using a program that locks you out of the internet, or out of certain sites.   How should I schedule my day to protect my cognitive capacity?  Maximize your cognitive primetime: Because our brains prefer to conserve energy, we tend to gravitate toward level 1 tasks. These “quick and easy” activities give us a feeling of instant gratification. Unfortunately, doing these activities early in our workday can use up precious cognitive resources that we need for more important and challenging thinking tasks. This pattern often leads to an unproductive day.  Try mapping your typical peaks and troughs in energy throughout the day. Next, assign a level of difficulty to each of the activities you want to complete from Level 1 to Level 3 of cognitive difficulty. From there, you can thoughtfully map tasks against times of day.  How do I manage my to-do list?  We can simplify the exhaustive to-do list by organizing or chunking it into categories of what needs to be done. Categories are easier than exhaustive lists for the brain to process. The categories will be relevant to you and your job. For example, you might choose to categorize (or chunk) by priority, strategic initiatives, work functions, work processes, business areas or time critical reports and tasks. You can now begin to prioritize by putting the chunks in order of importance. You might be able to identify the top priority in each chunk as well.  At this point, you need to reduce your priorities to the top three. This step is the hardest for many people. A maximum of 3 is best because during overwhelm, our cognitive capacity is already taxed. You may well be able to achieve more than the top 3, but if you start there, you will target the most important things first. This approach can work for a day, a week, a month or for a vision you’d like to achieve in the longer term. Once you’ve reduced your overwhelming list of work to the essentials you’ll be better able to know where to put your energy and cognitive prime time.  What are some examples of if-then plans to sharpen my focus?  If-then plan examples:   * If I am tempted to multitask, then I will choose one task and set a 20-minute timer * When I am starting my workday, then I will identify my top 3 priorities before doing any work.   What are some tips to sharpen my focus?   * Do less: Let notifications run your day; Do more: Schedule specific times to check emails and notifications. * Do less: Multitask throughout the day; Do more: Prioritize tasks and focus on one at a time for better quality and efficiency. * Do less: Work continuously without breaks; Do more: Incorporate short breaks to reset and recharge your brain's focus. * Do less: Keep all tasks in your head; Do more: Use tools like lists or apps to manage tasks and free up mental space. * Do less: Jump immediately into daily tasks; Do more: Start your day with a planning session to set priorities and intentions. * Do less: Surround yourself with distractions; Do more: Organize your workspace to minimize visual and auditory distractions. * Do less: Ignore your body's signals; Do more: Pay attention to signs of fatigue or restlessness as cues to take a break or switch tasks.   APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How can I get better at time management? * My task list is too big, how do I get it all done? * I am in a constant state of overwhelm, how do I improve my ability to focus? * I am constantly interrupted, it is hard to find time to get my own work done. How can I manage this?  Scenarios F) Michelle Utility (African American) 1 Customer service  \*Michelle is a new manager in customer service at this power company  (Supporting: Chayton is on this team as her field manager)  Michelle is a new manager of a team of customer service representatives at a power company. She’s one month into the role and is slowly adjusting to all the changes. When she was an individual contributor, she never imagined being a manager would involve so much more to think about. Most days, she wakes up excited about her new position. But after just a few hours of emails, meetings, and big decisions, she feels mentally drained and spends much of the afternoon easily distracted and unproductive. Michelle knows she gets more done in her first hour at work than the rest of the day. She’s annoyed that after lunch, she can’t seem to handle the new volume of information she receives as a manager and wonders how she will cope. This thought distracts her so much that she loses her place in a document she’s working on, and her mind goes off on a tangent for 30 minutes. And it’s only Monday. She then begins to worry about her new boss noticing her lack of focus, which distracts her even more. The situation only seems to get worse as the week goes on. What can she do differently?  Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle is a new manager of a team of customer service representatives at a power company. She used to get mentally depleted by 11 a.m., but she now uses some new practices to help stay focused. She’s started using one of her office walls as a place to store information on sticky notes. When a team member asks her a complex question, she helps them simplify the issue to the core and is careful to break it into chunks. She prioritizes the most important tasks first thing in the morning, when her mind is at its sharpest. And she takes mental breaks each hour for 10 minutes, going to the water cooler and stretching. With these practices, she’s able to stay focused throughout the day more often. **Blog posts** What are some tips to focus better when I am experiencing exhaustion and overwhelm?  High levels of stress are known to reduce the resources we need to think deeply. Our brains are dealing with more and bigger problems. To make matters worse, many people are spending much more time in virtual meetings, leading to “Zoom Exhaustion.”  These are real challenges, but there are steps you can take to get the most out of your limited cognitive resources.  Get your own work done first  Many people this year reported that while they are busier than ever, they are less able to get their own work done. Part of the issue is the overwhelm itself, combined with the constant meetings finding their way onto your calendar, and the relentless emails into your inbox.  One powerful hack is to tackle things that require more focus and concentration when your brain is at its best. For many people that tends to be first thing in the morning, before your brain gets overwhelmed by all the meetings and emails. Try to schedule meetings later in the morning, so you can get your own work down first before the chaos begins. We call this Minimal Meeting Mornings.  Find the creative spark  When it comes to doing deeper thinking, especially creative work, try experimenting with Minimal Meeting Mondays. Leave Mondays free of meetings if you can, or schedule them at the end of the day if you must.  When you’ve just had a good brain rest, you’re much more likely to have deeper insights—the catalysts of creativity. Insights require a quiet mind, minimal noise in the brain, which is more likely after a good rest.  Pace yourself  Your brain isn’t a machine. It needs regular rest. It functions similarly to a muscle—we can’t just work our muscles intensely for hours on end. Better to work out, then rest, then work out again.  Likewise, we need regular attention breaks so our brain can refresh and reset. This means scheduling meetings for 25 and 50 minutes instead of 30 and 60. After three focused meetings, take a break of at least 25 minutes.  Another strategy to stay fresh is to take a walking meeting at least once every day. This helps us maintain physical activity along with helping shift how our attention focuses.  Maintain good focus  Finally, a key practice is to work to maintain the right brain chemistry for good performance. The brain is an amazingly complex organism, but there are two chemicals that research suggests are critical to performance: dopamine, which involves novelty, positive expectations and positive experiences; and norepinephrine, or ‘brain adrenaline,’ which is associated with alertness.  It’s more difficult to maintain high levels of dopamine. But one way to boost your dopamine levels is to find ways to bring novelty in your day. Try working in different places and different approaches to your calendar. Experiment to find ways to keep the work interesting, and do your best work.  Honor your cognitive capacity.  Think of your cognitive capacity as a cup. If your cup is already full and you try to pour more water into it, the water spills over. That spilled water represents the ideas, plans, and reasons that escape you. Many of us are operating under constant elevated stress that, in effect, pokes a hole in the cup, letting more water leak out.  To combat this effect, try to balance tasks that drain your cognitive capacity with tasks that are less demanding. To decide what’s most important you can use a handy little framework we call FACT:  Fluency: Ask yourself how easy or hard it is to process something, like reading large amounts of some typefaces.  Amount: Our brains can only hold a limited amount of information in our mind at once, and research suggests that amount is four segments of information in our short-term as well as working memory.  Coherence: How much of the new information you’re trying to absorb connects to existing knowledge?  Time: How much time do you need to process the information?  By categorizing your tasks using FACT, your chances of focusing on the right thing at the right time will greatly increase.    **Time Management Isn’t What You Think**  Human beings struggle with a variety of cognitive biases that interfere with our ability to manage time, but brain science can help us improve.  One thing we all have in common is that we struggle with time. Old or young, industry-leading CEO or retired pensioner, we all know the feeling of wishing we had more of it. And we’re all too familiar with the irrational behaviors that go along with that sense of scarcity.  We’re consumed with busyness, and we struggle to resist distractions, which keep us from the things most important to us. We suffer from anxiety and overwhelm, and we wage endless battles against procrastination, overscheduling, and overcommitting.  Underlying all these problems, argues Oliver Burkeman, author of “Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals,” is a single, inescapable truth: Our time on Earth is finite. If we’re lucky, we’re afforded around 4,000 weeks — not nearly enough time to do everything worth doing.  The neuroscience of time management  The problem isn’t just that life is short. It’s that we don’t have trouble accepting its finitude. Death is a frightening, anxiety-inducing thought, and we engage in strategies of emotional avoidance to escape the discomfort of mortality. That’s why we struggle so much with procrastination and distraction, often spending the least time on the things we value most.  A number of cognitive biases interfere with our ability to be productive and manage our time well. One is hyperbolic discounting, also known as present bias — our tendency to choose smaller rewards now over larger rewards that are more distant in time. It’s why we choose impulsivity and immediate gratification over long-range goals.  Another is rosy prospection, or the persistent sense that someday, at an undefined point in some rosy, sun-drenched future, our real life will finally begin. It’s then, we imagine we’ll finally get a handle on time and be able to do the long-delayed things that really matter to us, such as hiking the Alps, starting a business, or playing with our kids.  But that’s an illusion. There’s no imminent future moment when we’ll magically have time for everything, no matter how efficient, productive, and disciplined we are.  What this boils down to is that if you think you’re managing your time imperfectly, you’re not spending time doing what’s important to you. If the most important thing in your life is to write a novel but you spend all your time playing video games, you’re not managing your time effectively.  Poor time management also leads to stress. When you constantly feel like you’re drowning, trying desperately to play catch up, it creates a threat state in the brain. Studies show our ability to do creative work is impaired when the brain is in even a mild threat state, which is why it’s critical to manage your time well enough to set your mind at ease.  Here are some strategies to redefine your relationship with time.  Stop trying to do everything  Conventional wisdom holds that better time management is about increasing efficiency, using productivity hacks to fit more work into less time. For decades, the consensus was that entrepreneurs, executives, and other high achievers should work themselves to the bone. On Wall Street, in Silicon Valley, and on Capitol Hill, “I can sleep when I’m dead” was a common refrain. Today we know that stiffing yourself on sleep not only takes years off your life but also makes you less productive overall.  Conventional wisdom also says we should skip lunch, power through distractions, grind things out in marathon meetings, and multitask to get more done. But the research tells us that cognitive capacity is limited and the brain needs frequent breaks. We’re actually more productive when we take downtime and give our brains a chance to rest, recharge, and generate insights.  The first step to time management, then, is to accept that we can’t do everything — to do what we can but stop faulting ourselves for not doing more. Then, in the limited time we have, focus on the actions most aligned with our most valued goals.  Reduce cognitive load  One of the biggest obstacles to effective time management is overwhelm. We all know the feeling of having so much to do it’s hard to even keep track, let alone finish it.  Working memory only holds a few units of information, and when our mental task list exceeds five or six items, the brain is forced to apportion part of our attention to just trying to make sure nothing falls through the cracks. We all know multitasking doesn’t work, but trying to keep track of all your tasks in your head can inadvertently have the same effect.  When cognitive load is high, we gravitate toward what’s easy, not what’s most important. If you’ve ever felt like the busier you get, the more time you waste scrolling your phone or staring off into space, overwhelm is the reason. Those procrastination activities are your attempt to escape overwhelm and find relief, a cognitive bias that emerges when we’re maxed out.  The solution is to reduce cognitive load, and the way to do that is to stop trying to keep track of everything in your head. The concept is called “capture,” getting all those nagging background thoughts out of your head and onto the page. So make a point to start each day by capturing all those things you have on your mind. By putting your goals, tasks, and priorities in writing where you know you won’t forget them, you free up cognitive resources to be creative and productive — so you can focus less on worrying and more on work.  Resist inner distractions  We all know about the dangers of distractions — Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and the thousand other technological temptations that vie for our attention. And there’s no doubt the traditional countermeasure — to cut out digital distractions by using blocker apps or turning off your phone — is sound advice.  But when we place all the blame on external distractions, we’re addressing only half the problem. Yes, those apps are designed to hijack our attention and addict us. But they don’t always do so against our will.  As Burkeman points out in his book, in the battle for our attention, we are often not hapless victims but willing collaborators. When we’re trying to get work done, we actively seek them out to escape discomfort. When a work task is difficult, stressful, or uncertain, we look for ways to relieve the pressure. And that usually takes the form of turning to something that’s easier on the brain but potentially less meaningful and important.  The underlying mechanism is experiential avoidance, our tendency to avoid strenuous, unpleasant, or difficult tasks, even if they’re important work priorities. The solution is to recognize that work can be difficult — to accept the discomfort of hard work, notice when we’re tempted to flee that discomfort, and be intentional about staying on task and building in breaks so the brain doesn’t get tired.  By accepting the finitude of time and the limits of cognitive capacity, we can be more intentional in our choices — and spend more time on the things we truly value. Challenges and Solutions Problem 1: Users feel overwhelmed by the volume of tasks and the constant barrage of virtual meetings, leading to reduced cognitive capacity and difficulty focusing on deep work.  Solution 1: Prioritize tasks according to cognitive demands, utilizing the morning or periods of highest mental clarity for tasks that require significant focus and creativity. Implement "Minimal Meeting Mornings" to protect these peak cognitive times from being eroded by meetings and emails, thereby enhancing productivity and reducing feelings of overwhelm.  Problem 2: The monotony of routine tasks and the stress of work can sap motivation and hinder creative thinking, making it difficult for users to generate new ideas or find innovative solutions to problems.  Solution 2: Introduce novelty and variety into the workday to boost dopamine levels, which are crucial for sustaining motivation and creativity. This can be achieved by changing work environments, tackling tasks in new ways, or scheduling creative work after restful breaks when the mind is more likely to produce insights.  Problem 3: Continuous work without adequate breaks depletes cognitive resources faster, leading to mistakes and decreased efficiency.  Solution 3: Encourage the practice of taking regular, strategic breaks to allow the prefrontal cortex to recharge. This could involve scheduling meetings for 50 minutes instead of an hour to provide built-in breaks or focused work sessions followed by short pauses. This helps to maintain high levels of cognitive function throughout the day and supports sustained attention and energy. FAQS  * How can I identify my cognitive peaks and troughs during the workday to optimize my schedule for high-focus tasks? * What strategies can I use to reduce feelings of overwhelm and improve my ability to focus on deep work amid constant virtual meetings? * In what ways can introducing novelty into my workday help boost my creativity and motivation? * How often should I take breaks to ensure my prefrontal cortex is recharged, and what are some effective ways to take these breaks? * How can I effectively prioritize tasks when everything feels urgent, to avoid cognitive overload and improve productivity? | |
| Habit 1: Optimize my brainSkill 2: Get unstuck Reflection activity:  What action did you take to work within your capacity limitations? How did this affect your productivity and focus?  Michelle’s story:  One of Michelle’s new tasks as manager is to increase her team’s efficiency. One way she’s tackling this challenge is to reorganize the timesheet/capacity management, but she keeps getting stuck. She’s determined to make it easier for her team to log their hours and get credit for the overtime hours they work. She’s attempted to solve the impasse six times over the last few hours with no solution. She’s frustrated but stubbornly decides to sit and stare at her computer until the problem is solved. By 2 p.m., she’s exhausted and realizes she hasn’t eaten all day. Michelle leaves to grab lunch from the nearby cafe. Halfway through eating, while staring out the window, not focused on anything, she suddenly has an idea, and thinks it may fix the problem. She rushes back to her desk to try it out.    Research  The moment we suddenly solve a problem, sometimes feeling like a lightbulb goes off in our brain, is called an insight. This occurs as a result of specific brain networks creating new neural connections or pathways, allowing us to come to a solution in a new way. The longer we’ve worked on a problem, or the more important it is, the stronger the insight will feel, and the more intensely it will impact your actions.  Measuring the strength of our insights can help us to decide which action to take or whether an idea is something we should follow up on. To easily measure their strength, we developed a tool called the Eureka Scale that ranges from a Level 1 to a Level 5 relating to the insight’s intensity. A Level 1 insight is one that is barely detected and disappears from your mind before you’re able to hold onto it. A Level 2 insight comes and goes in your mind, wavering a bit and is usually forgotten soon after. A Level 3 insight is something that’s interesting and feels exciting but not enough to motivate you to act. Level 4 is highly motivating and causes you to act, and is an experience that will be held in memory. Finally, a Level 5 insight is so impactful that you’ll remember it for a long time, possibly throughout your life. Even at the lowest level, insights release energy to tap into, so when you have one, try to act on it right away.  ACTIVITY 1  When or where do you have those aha moments that suddenly bring insight?  Non-anonymous  Comment on other people’s too here  Research shows people are most creative and insightful in the mornings, before they get bombarded by emails, meetings, and to-do lists, all acting to increase their cognitive load. Three of the most common places people have insights are lying in bed, right after waking up; standing in the shower; or during morning exercise. This makes sense based on the four conditions that significantly increase the chance of insight: quiet environments, inward focus, feeling positive emotions, and walking away from the problem. One of those conditions is what happened to Michelle: She stopped thinking about the problem and did something pleasant and slightly distracting to quiet her brain.  However, many people start their day by checking email before even getting out of bed. This will significantly reduce the likelihood of having an insight that helps solve a problem at hand. So, if you want to increase the chances of generating an insight, go as long as possible in the morning before looking at emails or scheduling meetings.  Actions to choose from:  If I have a problem I can’t solve, I’ll simplify it to a clear impasse: what I want to achieve and what’s standing in my way. I’ll see if any insights come from that.  If I can’t solve a problem after three attempts, I’ll put the problem aside and come back to it after doing something pleasant.  If I can’t solve the problem all day, I’ll sleep on it and see what happens.  Michelle’s story, take two:  The challenge of how to reorganize the timesheet/capacity management has been nagging Michelle all morning. After staring at her screen for about 2 hours, she realizes she won’t figure it out this way and needs to step away from the problem. So Michelle decides to take a quick walk and get some fresh air. Ten minutes into her walk, she suddenly has an idea, an insight, on something that might work. She’s so excited she jogs back to her office. The best part? It’s only 10 a.m., and she’s already onto the next task.  **Content:**  High-level overview Skill 2: Get Unstuck through Insight offers a transformative approach to problem-solving and creativity. This skill explores the neuroscience behind insights—those sudden, illuminating moments of clarity and innovative problem-solving. By understanding what happens in the brain before, during, and after an insight, as well as the conditions that enhance the likelihood of its occurrence, this skill equips individuals with strategies to foster environments conducive to generating insights. These environments are characterized by quietness, internal focus, a slightly positive mood, and distance from the problem at hand. The goal is to enable individuals to overcome obstacles and introduce innovative solutions by reconfiguring how information is linked across brain regions, thus facilitating novel ideas and significant behavioral benefits. This skill not only enhances personal problem-solving capabilities but also encourages the cultivation of a work culture that values quiet reflection, inward focus, and a positive atmosphere, thereby fostering a space where insights can flourish and lead to effective, creative solutions. **Theory** Linear problem-solving is when we rely on what we already know. We use a structured process, following a series of steps to find the right answer. Nonlinear problem-solving is when we solve a problem in a less-structured, holistic, and flexible manner.  What is an insight?  From experience, we all know insights to be those “aha” moments when suddenly a great idea comes to mind. For example: Suddenly, you know who to put on a team for an important project or where you can get the funds to bring your initiative to life.  The brain tries to link new concepts with previously established patterns and information. Insights arise when new information is put together in particularly novel ways. However, before the moment of insight arises, the signals are relatively weak and disconnected compared to those that are available for analytical forms of processing. There are certain conditions, though, in which those weak signals are more likely to emerge.  Research shows that insights change the way information is linked in our minds. New neural connections and patterns of activation create changes in the way we think about and solve problems, which in turn can create a route for lasting behavior change.  Research suggests there are specific conditions that promote the likelihood of insight. Essentially, the experience of threat and cognitive load inhibit insight occurrence. There are, broadly, four conditions that allow the subtle connections to come together in a moment of insight.  Insights help us find solutions because they are an effective way to solve complex problems and have new ideas. These new and novel ideas occur because insights reorganize how information is linked across brain regions.  Insights can facilitate activation of the brain’s reward system. This may involve the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is associated with feelings of engagement.  Why are insights important?  When insights activate the brain’s reward system, they are often intrinsically motivating. This can lead to behavior change.  The brain behaves in a predictable manner in the moments leading up to insight.  Quiet: Insights are small numbers of neurons speaking, so we need a quiet brain to notice them. It’s like a phone ringing at a noisy party—you need the other people to be quiet so you can hear it.  Internally focused: We tend to close our eyes or look up to the ceiling just before an insight. We are reflecting. Insights generally come from the non-conscious connecting existing ideas and memories in new ways. Even when around others, you are focused inward and not ‘out’ with them.  Slightly positive: We have already looked at the impact of threat on our ability to see connections and be open to new ideas. To be ready for insight, we need to minimize the threat and be in a slight toward state.  Not thinking directly about the problem: This one is counter-intuitive, but when we focus on the problem, we get a loud and busy PFC; we become externally focused and we tend to feel more negative. We need to stop focusing directly on the problem to allow new ideas to emerge.  What is the definition of insight?  A nonobvious solution from the nonconscious that emerges suddenly into awareness and combines existing data in new ways.  NLI has spent over a decade studying which conditions enable insight generation. The consensus is that there are four key ingredients: quiet moments, looking inward, positive emotion, and distance from the problem.  The richest insights happen when people are in a good frame of mind and away from the issue, in a place where they can reflect quietly. Or to put it another way, far more than what you should do, insight is about what you don’t do.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * I am not a naturally creative person, can I still have insights? * What is the scientific definition of insight? * What are the conditions that increase the chances of having an insight?  Application How can I create more opportunities for insight for myself?   * Ask yourself: “Am I building in time for quiet reflection? And if so, when is that time?” If you find most of your reflection happens at the end of the day, after fatigue has set in, you may consider moving it earlier. * Consider blocking out time for reflection in the morning, when the mind is rested and has yet to deal with a nagging inbox and other external demands. * Build in buffers between meetings – even these small breaks can make space for insight * Minimize external distractions. This doesn’t mean just noise. Visuals, digital pop ups, even other people can keep our focus outward. * Drawing or mapping your ideas is a way to look inward. * Resting your eyes by closing them or staring into space. * Define the problem clearly, then focus on possible solutions. This is particularly helpful in a group meeting or brainstorming session. * When stuck on a problem, take a break and come back to it – a 5 minute break is helpful, an overnight or longer break might be even better, if you have the time. * Activities that take your attention off the problem and put it on to something that is pleasant and not too challenging can help – e.g. walking, driving, gardening, swimming.   How do I have more insights?  Aim to create the four key conditions that support insight:  1. Provide quiet moments  Quiet moments help reduce external perceptual competition for our conscious attention, allowing the brain to detect weaker signals more readily. Block out quiet reflection time in your calendar, and create buffer time between meetings.  2. Look inward  Looking inward shifts the focus of awareness away from older, more established solutions and away from external input. It also can shift your focus to your thought process, as opposed to just the content of your thinking. Close your eyes or go for a walk and focus on what’s around you. Or try mapping or drawing your thoughts on paper.  3. Limit threat and create positive emotion  Research suggests that when people are in a positive (versus negative) mood, this state allows them to arrive at an insight more easily. Try things that feel good like a shower, exercise, or listening to music. Put your attention on possible solutions and off problems.  4. Reduce conscious attempts to solve problems  To allow for an insight to emerge, try “walking away” or not to think directly about a problem. Try a nap, or sleeping on the problem overnight.  What are some tips to have more insights?  Do less: Focus intently on the problem when stuck; Do more: Focus lightly on possible solutions when stuck  Do less: Immediately respond to problems with the first solution that comes to mind. Do more: Pause to reflect on different angles before deciding on an approach.  Do less: Operate in constant action mode. Do more: Allow for quiet periods of reflection to enable deeper thinking and insight generation.  Do less: Rely heavily on analytical thinking for all solutions. Do more: Balance analytical thinking with creative thought processes for a more rounded problem-solving approach.  Do less: Ignore the value of subconscious processing. Do more: Utilize activities that allow the mind to wander, such as walks or free writing, to facilitate insight development.  This list emphasizes the importance of a thoughtful, open, and reflective approach to overcoming obstacles and fosters an environment where deep, insightful thinking is nurtured to generate innovative solutions.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How can I have more insights? * How do I have creative ideas when I am feeling stressed? * How can I get an insight more quickly? * How do I make sure I remember my insights?  Scenarios Michelle’s story:  One of Michelle’s new tasks as manager is to increase her team’s efficiency. One way she’s tackling this challenge is to reorganize the timesheet/capacity management, but she keeps getting stuck. She’s determined to make it easier for her team to log their hours and get credit for the overtime hours they work. She’s attempted to solve the impasse six times over the last few hours with no solution. She’s frustrated but stubbornly decides to sit and stare at her computer until the problem is solved. By 2 p.m., she’s exhausted and realizes she hasn’t eaten all day. Michelle leaves to grab lunch from the nearby cafe. Halfway through eating, while staring out the window, not focused on anything, she suddenly has an idea, and thinks it may fix the problem. She rushes back to her desk to try it out.  Michelle’s story, take two:  The challenge of how to reorganize the timesheet/capacity management has been nagging Michelle all morning. After staring at her screen for about 2 hours, she realizes she won’t figure it out this way and needs to step away from the problem. So Michelle decides to take a quick walk and get some fresh air. Ten minutes into her walk, she suddenly has an idea, an insight, on something that might work. She’s so excited she jogs back to her office. The best part? It’s only 10 a.m., and she’s already onto the next task. Blog posts The Four Ingredients of Insight  Quiet moments: Quiet moments help reduce external perceptual competition (e.g., sights, sounds) for our conscious attention or awareness, allowing the brain to detect weaker signals more readily.  Looking inward: Looking inward, or thinking about your thinking (also known as metacognition), shifts the focus of awareness away from older, more established solutions, and away from external input. It also can shift your focus to your thought process itself, as opposed to just the content of your thinking.  Positive emotion: Research suggests people are more likely to solve more problems with insight when in a positive mood than in a negative mood.  Distance from the problem: When you walk away from the problem and allow your attention to drift, this frees up the conscious mind from focusing on very strong and well-rehearsed signals.  ARIA: Your Insight-Generation Power Tool  When insights occur, they generate an intense and memorable moment in the brain. The more intense the insight, the greater the motivational drive and more likely individuals will act on it. It’s true, insights can happen on their own, but they’re more likely to occur under ideal conditions. When teams are collaborating to solve a client problem or generate ideas for a product re-launch, The ARIA Model — which stands for awareness, reflection, illumination, and action — can help us understand how to recognize the emergence of insight in ourselves and others, and then create space in that moment to share.  Awareness  As soon as we become aware of a problem or dilemma, this triggers a process in our brain that allows us to make sense of it. In fact, when new information is presented or a new problem appears, this is represented in our brains as a conflict between neural schemas — those we’ve created for previously used solutions and this new one. While sometimes problems have clear solutions based on previous success, or we’re able to access the perfect neural schema quickly, other times new solutions are harder to come by and integrating distantly-related neural maps is an additional part of the process. Whether or not the problem is your primary focus at the time, these neural comparisons are being made in the background and can eventually lead to a solution.  Pro tip: Don’t be shy. Invite others to the problem party. If only one person is aware, making others aware can broaden the possible solutions and even the number of people that could have the insight. Just be sure you frame it positively because being in a good mood increases the possibility of insight.  Reflection  Once new information is presented, give yourself some distance from the problem. While this may seem counterintuitive, one of the best ways to encourage insights is to stop thinking about a solution. In fact, we’re more likely to have insights during periods of downtime – which we often do wrong – so this is the perfect time to take a walk and enable those internally-focused thoughts while you just enjoy the cool breeze on your face. Research has revealed predictable patterns of brain activity that occur in these moments to quiet any new or distracting information. When we aren’t actively trying to solve the problem or we shift our focus internally and orient our thinking in a positive way, we reduce the louder noise in the brain, letting the quiet signals emerge.  Pro tip: If you’re in a pinch and reflection needs to happen in a room with others, keep an eye out for someone tilting their head or looking into the distance. Use this as an indicator to suggest that everyone turn their cameras off or take a quick stretch outside the room. The reflective process is critical to insight.  Illumination  This is where the magic happens. At the moment of insight, new neural synapses are formed, which connect dots and make sense of the information we’ve gathered, and compared with a lifetime of memories. When these new neural schemas are made, recognition of how to solve the previously unsolvable problem is brought into the spotlight. If you’ve ever been in the shower and, seemingly out of nowhere, you figure out the thing you couldn’t for the life of you come up with when you needed it, that’s the “Aha!” illumination moment. Every bit of our focus goes to one emotion-filled spark of insight, and that emotion acts as glue, creating a temporary bond of problem to solution. This is the best time to share that insight with others.  Pro tip: When someone has that spark of illumination, the emotion accompanying the insight is likely obvious — some might say “written all over their face.” So if you recognize what’s happening, stop in your tracks mid-sentence if necessary, and ask them to share: “It looks like you have an idea. What is it?”  Action  The powerful spark of insight provides us with an opportunity to act. The illumination is immediately followed by a surge of motivational drive, with its underpinnings in the engagement of motivational brain regions and a release of neurochemicals such as dopamine, inspiring us towards our goals. However, this energy is like inertia — it will stay there and turn to nothing unless moved. There can be a motivational drive to act on what we’ve suddenly and dramatically realized, but we have to tap into it in the moment.  Pro tip: If you’re on a walk when the insight sparks (or in the shower, as it often happens), make a quick statement to yourself about what you’ll do with it. If you’re in a team meeting, get the entire group to commit to next steps as soon as the insight is shared. This is how to move thinking forward, get unstuck, and put teams on the agile path to higher performance. Challenges and Solutions Problem 1: Team members struggle to come up with innovative solutions, often feeling stuck in conventional ways of thinking, which hampers creativity and problem-solving abilities.  Solution 1: Create an environment that encourages quiet reflection and internal focus. Allocate specific times during the workday for individuals to disconnect from their immediate tasks and engage in activities that promote a slightly positive mood, such as brief walks or mindfulness exercises. This setting helps to facilitate the neural conditions necessary for insight, allowing team members to form new connections and ideas.  Problem 2: A high-stress environment and prevalent negative mood among team members inhibit the occurrence of insights, making it difficult to see connections and be open to new ideas.  Solution 2: Foster a positive work culture by minimizing external stressors and encouraging practices that promote positive emotions. This can involve recognizing achievements, providing support for team members' wellbeing, and creating opportunities for social interaction that boosts morale. A positive emotional state increases the likelihood of insights by creating a conducive mental environment for innovative thinking.  Problem 3: Persistent direct focus on unresolved problems can lead to mental fatigue and a decrease in the ability to think creatively, preventing the emergence of new solutions.  Solution 3: Encourage team members to periodically step away from the problem at hand, allowing their subconscious to process information in the background. This could be facilitated through practices like "Insight Breaks," where individuals engage in unrelated, enjoyable activities that distract them from the problem, such as physical exercise or hobbies. This distance not only refreshes the mind but also creates the mental space necessary for insights to emerge, leading to novel solutions upon returning to the problem. FAQS  * What are some specific activities I can undertake during my workday to create the quiet moments necessary for insight generation? * How can I cultivate a slightly positive mood that is conducive to experiencing insights, especially during stressful work periods? * Can you provide examples of how to effectively distance myself from a problem to allow my subconscious to process information and facilitate insights? * How can I engage in internal reflection without disrupting my daily workflow and productivity? * What strategies can be employed to minimize direct focus on a problem when trying to generate innovative solutions, and how can these be integrated into a busy work schedule? | |
| Habit 1: Optimize my brainSkill 3: Challenge assumptions (F  Michelle’s story:  As Michelle is working to increase her team’s efficiency, she realizes she needs someone to step in and help with project management, especially around service procedures to teams in the field. When considering her team members, she decides to give the task to Melissa because they’ve collaborated well a few times before, and she trusts her to get the job done — and it doesn’t hurt that they went to the same school. But a few weeks later, she discovers her team was upset at how this decision was made and feels that Michelle overlooked someone else who some felt would’ve been better to lead the project. What’s more, Melissa has made a few mistakes and upset others in the process— so much so that one of Michelle’s team members quits.  Research  We are constantly making decisions, from small decisions like what to eat for breakfast to larger ones like how to handle the impact of a team member leaving. To simplify and speed up some of our decision-making, we’ve evolved a set of mental shortcuts, also known as cognitive biases. These often operate automatically and under our conscious awareness. While biases can be helpful at times, they can also cause us to overlook crucial information or fresh perspectives that affect our decisions.  There are more than 150 cognitive biases that we organized into five broad categories, called The SEEDS Model®. Similarity biases refer to our preference for people who are like us over those who are different from us. Expedience biases happen when we rush to make a quick decision, relying on information that’s easy to access. Experience biases lead us to assume the way we perceive things is the objective truth, and distance biases are our brains’ tendency to assign greater value to people and things that are closer to us in space and time. Finally, safety biases push us to choose things that keep us safe rather than taking risks to try new things.  Activity 1:  Which bias (or biases) led Michelle to choose Melissa for the project?  If you have a brain, you have bias. By understanding this, you can check for bias and mitigate its effects in the moment — or even ahead of time. Next time you make a decision, start by labeling any biases that might influence your thinking or lead you to make a quick choice without considering all the options. Then, you can start to mitigate these biases by getting other perspectives, finding commonalities with people who seem different from you, being willing to take reasonable risks, and ensuring you’re thinking of folks, whether they’re down the hall or across the pond. The more you engage and make bias mitigation a team effort, the more likely you’ll make sound decisions.  Activity 2:  Think of a recent decision you made. Could bias have impacted your decision? If so, how could you have mitigated that bias?  Actions to choose from:  If I have an important decision to make, I’ll get input from people with different perspectives.  If I find myself gravitating toward what’s familiar, I’ll pause and ask myself what other options there are.  If I find myself rushing to make a quick decision, I’ll slow down and research less obvious alternatives.  Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle has a challenging new project to assign to one of her team members and knows the decision needs to be made carefully. She's aware she may have a few unhelpful biases.  Michelle asks her team to consider the top three skills the project leader should have. Once they’ve agreed on the most important skills, she asks them to think about who best represents these skills and come back with their thoughts. To her surprise, the consensus points to Alex, who’s often quiet in meetings and someone Michelle wouldn’t have otherwise considered. Giving Alex the role turns out to be a brilliant decision. They engage all stakeholders thoroughly and do a great job fixing some complex processes. The experience reminds Michelle that even if she feels confident in a decision, it’s important to get other people’s perspectives — especially when the decision really matters.  **Content:**  High-level overview Skill 3: Challenge Assumptions (Bias) provides a comprehensive framework for recognizing and mitigating cognitive biases that affect decision-making and creativity in the workplace. This skill addresses the natural tendencies of the human brain to rely on cognitive shortcuts—biases—which, while efficient, can lead to errors in judgment, rushed decisions, and suboptimal outcomes. By exploring the SEEDS® Model, which categorizes biases into five main types—similarity, expedience, experience, distance, and safety—this skill helps individualsidentify when and how these biases are most likely to occur and influence decisions.  The program emphasizes the importance of challenging assumptions and broadening perspectives to enhance objectivity and decision-making quality. It offers practical strategies for mitigating biases, such as fostering diverse and inclusive teams, slowing down the decision-making process to consider a wider range of information, and actively seeking out differing opinions. By implementing these strategies, individuals can overcome mental blind spots and improve their ability to make informed, equitable decisions even under stress or time pressure.  Skill 3 equips individuals with the knowledge to spot biases in themselves and also provides actionable steps for building resilience against biased thinking, thereby fostering a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and effective problem-solving. Theory Work today means**Distance Bias** - “Close is better than far.”  Distance biases are the brain’s natural tendency to value people, events, and things based on their proximity to us in time and space. Since we unconsciously assign less value to things that are psychologically distant, we overvalue short-term concerns while undervaluing the long-term implications of our decisions. Examples of distance bias include temporal discounting and affective forecasting.  **Safety** **Bias** - “Bad is stronger than good.”  Safety biases arise from the brain’s threat-detection network, which continuously scans our environment for signs of danger and threat, both real and perceived. Since undetected threats can be fatal, we assign far greater weight to potential losses than we do to potential gains; this network operates on a faster and more instinctive basis than the reward-detecting network. In c juggling multiple tasks, facing tight deadlines, enduring stress, and making decisions that are often based on limited information. Through all of this, doing good work demands objectivity. Unfortunately, while we assume that we are objective, we forget that, as human beings, we are subject to a variety of cognitive biases that influence thinking, perception, and decision-making.  Cognitive biases are mental shortcuts we use to process the world around us. They occur automatically, without conscious intent, and below conscious awareness. The host of biases evolved to help us survive, by enabling us to think and make decisions faster and more efficiently.  But while these shortcuts can be valuable, research shows that they can also lead us astray by creating mental blind spots—especially when we’re stressed, under pressure, or in a hurry, resulting in a variety of problems:   * Errors in thinking. In our efforts to simplify, we can overlook important information or assume we know all there is to know. * Rushed decisions. Rushed decisions can have a negative impact on people and events. * Suboptimal outcomes. Applying the same solution to a different context and expecting the same result.   Researchers have identified more than 150 cognitive biases. The SEEDS® Model represents five main categories of biases that shape everyday thinking: similarity bias, expedience bias, experience bias, distance bias, and safety bias.  Similarity Bias - “I feel more comfortable with people like me.” Similarity biases arise from our innate motivation to distinguish between friends and foes. Based  on their similarity to us, we unconsciously categorize people as belonging to one of two groups:  in-group (friends) or out-group (foes). We tend to trust and rely on information from in-group members, whereas we tend to be more suspicious and less open to what we hear from out-group members.  Expedience Bias - “If it feels right, it must be true.”  Expedience biases save mental energy by directing our focus to the most readily available, recallable, and recent information. This tendency to jump to conclusions often results in evaluating choices based on obvious, incomplete, or flawed information. Examples of Expedience bias include confirmation bias and availability bias.  Experience Bias - “My perceptions are accurate.”  Experience biases stem from two unconscious beliefs: that we see things as they are and that we know all there is to know. These beliefs cause us to think of the world we experience as a direct and objective representation of reality. As a result, we assume that others can and do see things the way we do. We fail to recognize that our perception of reality is fundamentally subjective and thus imperfect, limited, and different from that of others. Examples of Experience bias include Bias blind spot and Fundamental Attribution Error.  consequence, we are far more sensitive to potential risk and loss than we are to potential rewards. Examples of safety bias include loss aversion and framing effects.  Citations  Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow. Macmillan.  Lieberman, M. D., Rock, D., Halvorson, H. G., & Cox, C. L. (2015). Breaking bias updated: The SEEDS Model®. NeuroLeadership Journal, Volume 6. Banaji, M. R., Greenwald, A. G., & Martin, E. (2016). Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people. New York: Bantam.  In which situations is bias most likely to occur?  Similarity bias Context Triggers:   * Hiring & promotion * Project assignment   Expedience bias Context Triggers:   * Looming deadlines or time pressure * Speedy/in-the-moment decision-making   Experience bias Context Triggers:   * Past collaborations * Procedural familiarity   Context Trigger for Distance bias:   * Remote workforce * Project’s timeline * Short- vs long-term outcomes   Safety bias Context Triggers:   * Organizational changes * Invested effort & resources   How can I spot bias in others? What are some signs that bias is at work?  Behaviors indicative of potential similarity bias:   * Favoring individuals who have similar work experience Favoring individuals or groups with whom you have mutual relationships   Behaviors indicative of potential expedience bias:   * Relying on who or what comes to mind the fastest or the most frequently   Behaviors indicative of potential Experience bias:   * Engaging in like-minded thinking with like-minded others * Always asking your go-to person   Behaviors indicative of potential Distance bias:   * Overlooking individuals who are remote (e.g., not on camera) * Valuing shorter- rather than longer-term outcomes   Behaviors indicative of potential Safety bias:   * Overweighing potential losses over gains * Holding on to projects that are no longer viable or fruitful   Question: Is unconscious bias always bad?  Answer: No, unconscious bias is not always bad. In fact, it’s necessary. Our brain evolved to use biases to help us make decisions swiftly and with less effort, based on minimal information. It was essential to our survival as a species, and even today makes it possible for us to react more efficiently and effectively to the demands of our day-to-day work. Unconscious bias doesn’t always lead us down the wrong path. It’s only when a decision meets a certain threshold of importance — because it is potentially costly to get it wrong, or because it will have long-term impact — that it makes sense to take additional steps to ensure that decision isn’t biased.  Question: Why do some biases seem to be more of a problem in my company than others?  Answer: While everyone is vulnerable to all five types of SEEDS biases, circumstances in the environment can make some biases even more likely to be triggered. For example, when things move quickly and time pressure is high, expedience biases are more likely. When companies are global and colleagues on the same team work in different offices or remotely, distance biases can arise. And when an organization is experiencing a lot of change, safety biases are often prevalent.  Question: How does culture impact bias?  Answer: All human beings are impacted by the five types of SEEDS biases. They are the result of how the brain is structured and, therefore, universal. However, the content of certain biases — particularly similarity biases — can and do change as a function of culture. Because different cultures can have different stereotypes about groups, some group differences can seem more salient than others.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * Is unconscious bias always bad? * Does learning about bias make us less biased? * If I am aware of bias will I be less biased? * Is there such a thing as conscious bias? * Why are people consciously biased? * What is the role of intuition in decision-making?  Application How do I mitigate Similarity bias?   * A general principle for mitigating similarity bias is to find commonalities. * As a first step, including diverse people in a decision-making process is enormously beneficial because diverse teams are literally smarter. * We want to prioritize visible diversity, (diversity of identity), which is the best way to get cognitive diversity. * Diverse teams are more likely to use "Cognitive Elaboration", where people are forced to make more effort to explain their ideas, resulting in deeper, broader, and richer thinking. * Of course, it is also useful to include people with diverse perspectives, for example, people from different departments within the organization, or people from different industries * Create shared goals and experiences between people. * Research shows that shared goals are extremely effective at uniting diverse team members.This creates inclusion, which is critical in diverse teams, because inclusion makes it safe for people to share their ideas, dissent, and challenge each other. * When choosing between a range of diverse candidates, focus on similarities between yourself and each candidate, to mitigate the tendency to put those different to you into an unconscious out-group. * Remove distinguishing features from people decisions – for example on resumes during selection. * Selecting people based on pre-determined criteria reduces the temptation to "go with our gut" (which is often Similarity bias in disguise). * We are often tempted to recruit people who we feel will be a good cultural fit. Consider asking instead: Who might be a "cultural add"?   How do I mitigate Expedience bias?   * Expedience bias is when we assume that if it feels right it must be true, and usually occurs when we are rushing or experiencing cognitive overwhelm. * How to mitigate - an overarching strategy to mitigate expedience bias: paint a complete picture. * Revisit ideas after a break to see them freshly * Break process into chunks or steps to slow down the process * Create opportunities to consider all information and also to test assumptions * When there is a chain of decision makers sometimes each person assumes the person before or after them has closely reviewed the material * Schedule sufficient time to make decisions – especially for committees or in a meeting * A thought experiment to try: imagine your first choice – the intuitive choice – is not available. This is a way to slow down and get additional options on to the table.   How do I mitigate Experience bias?   * Experience bias is when we assume our perceptions are accurate and objective, rather than subjective. * Remember, this is the hardest bias to catch ourselves in, so engaging others is very important. * How to mitigate in general: get other perspectives * Get multiple, diverse opinions * Assign a devil's advocate/provocateur/chief contrarian in meetings * An activity to try: argue the opposing point of view and have someone else argue your point of view. * This is a form of perspective-taking. * Another way to perspective-take is to ask "What would someone else do in this situation?" * Make sure you have additional information from a variety of sources – this allows you to ensure all options are on the table for consideration * Building in time for peer review means several sets of eyes on a decision.   How do I mitigate Distance bias?   * Distance bias causes things closer to us to appear more important than things that are further away – both in terms of time and physical proximity. * How to mitigate in general: take distance out of the equation. * Form teams based on skill, regardless of location if possible – in this new hybrid world that is getting easier. * Use technology to ensure you connect with people who are not in the office. * Here at NLI everyone joins meetings virtually, even if some participants are in the office. This creates a level playing field for inclusion, and makes inclusion easy. * If holding hybrid meetings, a good tip is to call on those joining virtually first. * Take all schedules and timezones when organizing meetings and events. * Consider the schedules of parents, people in other regions, and other preferences. * Try rotating the timing of recurring meetings so the same people are not inconvenienced. * A helpful thought experiment. Decide as if the benefits would be yielded sooner.   How do I mitigate Safety bias?   * Safety bias is due to the brain's organizing principle, which is to avoid threat in order to keep us safe. In the workplace, this usually plays out as efforts to avoid risk and loss. * How to mitigate in general: decide for someone else. This reduces the activation of threat in the brain. * We can seek advice from someone who won't be impacted – they are likely to be more objective and less sensitive to risk. * Try a thought experiment: imagine you do not own the problem or benefits of the decision. For example, ask your team, “if this wasn’t our problem what would we do?” * Another thought experiment: Imagine you are giving advice to someone in your situation. * A committee to review project viability can identify underperforming projects and make the tough decision to discontinue them, instead of falling prey to sunk cost bias. * Any process that evaluates risks against opportunities can help decision makers to be more objective by providing hard data. This could be a list of pros and cons or something more sophisticated. * Seeking anonymous feedback is a way to make it safe for everyone to speak up – Safety bias can prevent us from doing this due to our hardwired desire for cohesion and harmony within groups.   How do I mitigate bias?  To mitigate similarity bias:   * Find commonalities   Mitigate similarity bias in-the-moment   * Create shared goals * Focus on similarities * Deliberately consider others for a stretch opportunity   Preventative measures to mitigate similarity bias:   * Remove identifying features from resume * Outline project- or role- specific criteria * Include diverse people in the decision making process   To mitigate Expedience bias   * Paint a complete picture   Mitigate Expedience bias in-the-moment   * Explore odd ideas * Imagine your first choice is not available * Take breaks for a fresh look   Preventative measures for Expedience bias   * Prioritize options against set criteria * Schedule sufficient time to make the decision * Create a process to check assumptions * Break the decision making process into chunks   To mitigate Experience bias   * Get other perspectives   Mitigate Experience bias in-the-moment   * Get multiple, diverse opinions * Assign a devil's advocate * Argue another point of view as a thought experiment   Preventative measures for Experience bias   * Build in time for peer reviews * Designate a process for obtaining additional information from a variety of sources   To mitigate Distance bias   * Take distance out of the equation   Mitigate Distance bias in-the-moment   * Decide as if the benefits would be yielded sooner * Imagine you are in the future, with the decision already made   Preventative measures for Distance bias   * Form teams based on skill, regardless of location * Take all schedules and timezones into account * Utilize technology to connect with people virtually   To mitigate Safety bias   * Decide for someone else   Mitigate Safety bias in-the-moment   * Imagine giving advice to someone in your situation * Seek advice from someone who won't be impacted * List pros and cons   Preventative measures to mitigate Safety bias   * Committee to review project viability * Process to evaluate risks against opportunities   Question: In my organization, we need to make decisions quickly. How can I break bias when I have to move so fast?  Answer: The strategies that mitigate bias are not always very time-consuming. But even when they are, it’s useful to think about it in a different way. How long does it take to undo the damage created by a bad decision (e.g., a bad hire, a poor investment)? Taking a little more time on the front end of a decision can save a great deal more time on the back end, so ultimately your organization will move faster with fewer mistakes.  Question: How can I address it when someone else is being biased?  Answer: Bias is a sensitive subject because many people assume that being biased is a character flaw rather than a consequence of simply having a brain. It’s best not to directly accuse someone of engaging in biased thinking. Instead, speak in broader terms about how “our” thinking might be impacted by a particular bias:  You know, we are under so much time pressure, we probably have some expedience bias. Let’s slow down a little … Let’s make sure that we don’t fall victim to similarity bias when thinking about the best candidate for the job …  What are some examples if-then plan to mitigate bias?   * If I find myself rushing to make an important decision, then I will pause and ask for a second opinion from someone outside my trusted circle. * If I am making a final hiring decision, then I will get a second opinion from a colleague who has a different set of experiences to check my thinking. * If I’m preparing for a group interview, then I will ask the team to define four questions we want to ask of each candidate. * If I am being pressured to approve something I am not familiar with during a meeting, then I will ask to review the details and impact more carefully as a group and with others.   What are some tips to make better decisions?  Do less: Rely solely on gut feeling or first impressions when making decisions.  Do more: Seek out data and evidence to challenge initial impressions and validate decisions.  Do less: Dismiss ideas that differ from your own.  Do more: Actively listen to and consider alternative viewpoints as potential learning opportunities.  Do less: Ignore biases that affect decision-making.  Do more: Identify and acknowledge your own biases to minimize their impact.  Do less: Hold onto preconceived notions about people or situations.  Do more: Regularly reassess your assumptions in light of new information.  Do less: Overlook the role of diverse perspectives in problem-solving.  Do more: Encourage contributions from people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences.  Do less: Make decisions in isolation.  Do more: Collaborate with others to benefit from collective intelligence and reduce bias.  Do less: Assume there's only one correct approach.  Do more: Embrace a testing mindset where multiple solutions are explored and evaluated.  This format is aimed at fostering an environment where bias is recognized and systematically mitigated, encouraging open-mindedness, and promoting diverse perspectives for more informed decision-making and growth.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * In my organization, we need to make decisions quickly. How can I break bias when I have to move so fast? * How do I identify unconscious bias in myself? * How can I avoid offending people with accidental micro-aggressions? * What do I say if someone accuses me of being biased? * How can I make decisions faster? * Is it ever okay to go with your gut in decision-making?  Scenarios Michelle’s story:  As Michelle is working to increase her team’s efficiency, she realizes she needs someone to step in and help with project management, especially around service procedures to teams in the field. When considering her team members, she decides to give the task to Melissa because they’ve collaborated well a few times before, and she trusts her to get the job done — and it doesn’t hurt that they went to the same school. But a few weeks later, she discovers her team was upset at how this decision was made and feels that Michelle overlooked someone else who some felt would’ve been better to lead the project. What’s more, Melissa has made a few mistakes and upset others in the process— so much so that one of Michelle’s team members quits.  Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle has a challenging new project to assign to one of her team members and knows the decision needs to be made carefully. She's aware she may have a few unhelpful biases.  Michelle asks her team to consider the top three skills the project leader should have. Once they’ve agreed on the most important skills, she asks them to think about who best represents these skills and come back with their thoughts. To her surprise, the consensus points to Alex, who’s often quiet in meetings and someone Michelle wouldn’t have otherwise considered. Giving Alex the role turns out to be a brilliant decision. They engage all stakeholders thoroughly and do a great job fixing some complex processes. The experience reminds Michelle that even if she feels confident in a decision, it’s important to get other people’s perspectives — especially when the decision really matters. Challenges and Solutions Problem 1: Teams often default to familiar solutions and team members for projects, driven by similarity and experience biases. This limits the diversity of thought and can hinder innovation by overlooking novel approaches and perspectives.  Solution 1: Actively seek out and include diverse perspectives in decision-making processes. Implement strategies such as creating shared goals to unite diverse team members and prioritizing visible diversity to ensure cognitive diversity. Encourage cognitive elaboration, where team members are prompted to explain their ideas in depth, leading to more comprehensive and innovative problem-solving.  Problem 2: In high-pressure situations with tight deadlines, expedience bias can lead teams to make hasty decisions based on incomplete or readily available information, potentially overlooking better options.  Solution 2: Slow down the decision-making process by breaking it into steps or chunks, allowing for a more thorough evaluation of all information. Implement a practice of revisiting initial decisions after a break to view them with fresh eyes, and encourage the exploration of alternative options by imagining that the first choice is unavailable.  Problem 3: Safety bias leads to an overemphasis on avoiding loss and risk, making it challenging to pursue innovative projects or make bold decisions that could lead to significant rewards.  Solution 3: Adopt a mindset of deciding for someone else to reduce the activation of threat responses in the brain. This approach can help in evaluating decisions more objectively. Form committees or utilize processes that weigh risks against opportunities, and seek anonymous feedback to create a safe environment for all voices to be heard. Encourage thought experiments that reframe the decision-making process, such as imagining advising a colleague, to help overcome the natural aversion to risk and embrace potential gains. FAQS  * How can I recognize when I'm under the influence of expedience bias during fast-paced decision-making processes? * What are effective strategies for fostering an inclusive environment that naturally mitigates similarity bias within diverse teams? * In what ways can I ensure that long-term objectives are not overshadowed by distance bias in planning and decision-making? * Can you provide examples of how to incorporate checks for experience bias in routine evaluations or feedback sessions? * What practical steps can be taken to reduce the impact of safety bias when considering new projects or innovative ideas? | |
| Habit 2: Regulate emotionsSkill 1: Understand emotions ~~(~~  Daiyu’s story:  (Backstory of Daiyu: new nursing manager: goals are to improve the patient outcomes for her floor…what she is adopting from her previous manager into were a few poor months’ #s)  It’s noon on Friday, and Daiyu, a nursing manager, is rushing to complete a weekly patient care report that’s due by 5 p.m. Her mind keeps wandering back to an argument she got into with her wife that morning and how she could have handled the situation differently. Instead she stormed out, needing to get a break from the conflict. She gets increasingly frustrated that she can’t seem to focus on the task at hand. Even when she tries to ignore these feelings, it doesn’t seem to help. Then, one of her nursing interns knocks on her closed office door and, without waiting for an answer, sticks his head in and says, “Hey, boss? I could really use your help with a patient down the hall.” Annoyed and unable to deal with one more problem, Daiyu snaps, “I don’t have time right now. You’re going to have to figure it out yourself.”  Research  Since the brain’s primary goal is to keep us alive, it constantly scans the environment for potential threats. This gives us the ability to avoid dangers and move toward opportunities. This mechanism of minimizing threat and maximizing reward is the organizing principle of the brain — or, as we call it, being in a toward or away state. Being in a toward state is similar to when we feel engaged, attentive, and productive, while being in an away state — like Daiyu — is when we feel distracted, uncertain, and annoyed.  ACTIVITY 1:  Think about a recent meeting at work where your team discussed a problem. Where would you place yourself on a scale of being in a toward or away state?  (On a slider with no numbers)  Our away response is more intense and quicker to engage than our toward response because from the perspective of the way our brains react, anything bad is stronger than anything good. From an evolutionary standpoint, this makes sense: If our prehistoric ancestors missed a reward, they might miss lunch. But if they missed a threat, they might be lunch. The limbic system, comprising the amygdala (which processes our emotions), the hippocampus (which controls memory formation and retrieval), and other networks, is central in detecting and responding to potential threats and rewards and, therefore, focusing our attention on them.  Of course, not all threats are equal — nor are they necessarily bad. A mild threat response can make you more alert, focused, and able to get things done. We call this a Level 1 threat. For example, a tight but manageable deadline could trigger a Level 1 threat.  Beyond Level 1, you become alarmed and frazzled. When you start to realize you’ll most likely miss the deadline, you can enter a Level 2 threat. And if you do miss the deadline, your boss asks where the report is, and you find your heart racing, you’re probably in a Level 3 threat.  Threats can be physical, like a predator stalking you in the forest or a reckless driver on the highway, or social, like feeling ignored in a team meeting or being passed over for a promotion. Both physical and social threats can elicit a threat response. For Daiyu, the upcoming deadline placed her in a Level 1 threat. Ordinarily, that might help her focus, but the stress of fighting with her wife that morning nudged Daiyu into a Level 2 threat. And when her direct report barged into her office asking for help with a problem, it pushed Daiyu all the way to a Level 3 threat — which caused her to respond irritably.  ACTIVITY 2:  When was the last time you were at a Level 3 threat? What was that like?  Experiencing threats reduces the already limited capacity of our brains. The limbic system (involved in emotional processing and survival) and prefrontal cortex (involved in logical thinking and self control) are in somewhat of a seesaw. Think back to the analogy of our cognitive capacity as actors on a stage. A Level 1 threat can increase the spotlight intensity on an actor (in other words, increase your focus on a specific task), while reducing how far the illumination spreads on the stage. It helps us stay focused and filter out irrelevant information — but it can cause tunnel vision, or can easily be nudged into a Level 2 threat if stress multiplies. Level 2 and 3 threats turn down the spotlight and all the lights on stage until, at Level 3, you feel completely in the dark and unable to think clearly. And that’s why we often make mistakes when we’re stressed.  ACTIONS TO CHOOSE:  If I feel distracted from what I need to focus on, I’ll identify the emotion and issue that might be in the background in a single sentence.  If I’m in an away state, I’ll identify the level of threat I’m experiencing from 1-3.  If I feel distracted by my emotions, I won’t try to ignore them. Instead, I’ll acknowledge them so I can move forward.  Daiyu’s story, take two:  It’s noon on Friday, and Daiyu, a nursing manager, is rushing to complete a weekly patient care report that’s due by 5 p.m. Her mind keeps wandering back to an argument she got into with her wife that morning and how she could have handled the situation differently. Instead she stormed out, needing to get a break from the conflict. She realizes she’s in a Level 2 threat state, and she’s not going to be able to work productively until she can get back down to a manageable Level 1. So she grabs her coffee and heads to the hospital’s rooftop for some fresh air. While there, she calls her wife, apologizes for her part in the argument, and makes plans for dinner at their favorite restaurant. She takes a deep breath, feeling better, and heads back to her office. She sits down and begins typing, confident she can complete the report in a couple of hours.  **Content**:  High-level overview   Skill 4: Understand Emotions, dives deep into the brain's responses to environmental and social stimuli, focusing on the limbic system's role in sensing danger or reward. This skill illuminates how the brain's primary organization around the perception of threats—both real and perceived—impacts our cognitive processes, creativity, and collaboration abilities. It highlights the nuanced ways in which our brain prioritizes survival through a fight-or-flight response when faced with potential threats, and how this response can overshadow the pursuit of rewards, thereby affecting our ability to think clearly, solve problems, and work effectively with others.  Participants will learn to identify and manage the three levels of threat intensity, each involving distinct neural circuitry and affecting our mental state and capabilities in different ways. From the mild alertness of a Level 1 threat, where there's heightened alertness without alarm, to the high alarm of a Level 3 threat, where survival instincts dominate, this skill provides strategies to intentionally manage one's own responses to threats. By understanding these emotional responses, individuals can better navigate toward states that enhance creativity, collaboration, and insight generation, and away from states driven by fear or threat.  This skill is crucial for developing emotional intelligence, promoting a more mindful approach to personal and professional interactions, and fostering environments that minimize perceived threats and encourage a sense of reward and collaboration. It equips individuals with the knowledge and tools to better regulate their emotional responses, leading to improved decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace.     Theory The limbic system  The brain is much more than a thought-processing and reacting machine. Its fundamental purpose is to keep us alive. Sensing either danger or reward, even at surprisingly subtle levels, can have a dramatic impact on how and what we think. A brain network known as the “limbic system” (Catani, Dell’Acqua, & Thiebaut de Schotten, 2013; Rolls, 2015) scans signals streaming into the brain, telling us what to pay attention to and in what way to trigger an appropriate (mostly survival-motivated) response. When the brain detects a potential threat — a ferocious dog, a stranger or a silhouette in a dark alley, or even the angry face of a colleague — we nonconsciously take action to move away from that threat, regardless of whether the threat is perceived or real. Meanwhile, when the brain detects something that could help us survive or makes us feel good, we experience a psychological reward and nonconsciously take action to move toward that reward. Rewards include food, money, love, or even recognizing a familiar and friendly face in a crowd.  Threat and reward  Nowadays, we are much more likely to experience socio-emotional threats than physical ones. Unfortunately, our brains’ wiring to immediately detect and respond to any threat (LeDoux & Brown, 2017) often overrides our better judgment. The brain responds in similar ways to physical threats, such as encountering a bear in the woods, as it does to social threats, such as feeling wronged by a co-worker.  When we experience a real or perceived danger, a fight-or-flight response kicks in and activates various brain structures that are part of the set of brain regions commonly known as the limbic system. As a result, no matter whether the perceived threat is physical or social in nature, our high-level thinking processes may become impaired in the moment. This means our ability to recognize challenges accurately, solve problems, and work with others is diminished. We tend to get “tunnel vision,” focusing in on problems and detail rather than the big picture.  The brain’s organizing principle  When presented with a potential threat, we respond more powerfully and quickly than we would to a potential reward. This is because the brain’s threat system is stronger and more urgent than the reward system. When we feel threatened, our perception narrows to focus on the immediate problem, as if we have “tunnel vision.” We are less open to collaboration because our cognitive resources are focused on the threat instead of social interactions. Our higher-level cognitive abilities are temporarily impaired, and our creativity diminishes because we are less likely to notice the subtle signals that allow an insight to emerge.  Understand the impact of threat  The human brain is wired to detect both dangers and opportunities each waking second. Since the brain’s primary function is to keep us alive, the presence of threat, which can be fatal if ignored, affects us more intensely than the possibility of reward (Baumeister et al., 2001).  Threat and reward  There are areas of the brain that detect threat, real or perceived, to help us avoid danger. Our brain is also equipped to notice and register potential reward that helps us know when to continue and later repeat what we are doing. When we experience strong feelings of threat or reward, these brain systems tend to take over. When we experience too much threat, our more automatic, primitive brain systems tend to drive our behavior. Under conditions of high threat, we may experience a fight-or-flight response, and it becomes challenging for our executive functions, involved in high-level thought processes, to work optimally. However, there is an imbalance that is important to keep in mind. When presented with potential threat, we respond more powerfully and quickly. This is to say that threat is a more strong and urgent system than reward. At the same time, when we feel threatened, we have a hard time being creative, opening to ideas and input, and coming to new insights. Conversely, when we feel a sense of reward, we have an easier time collaborating with others, thinking creatively, and generating new ideas.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * What causes stress? * How much stress is positive or helpful? * What is emotional intelligence? * Why do I feel stressed so often?    Application How do I identify the three levels of threat?  When we detect a real or imagined threat, the brain goes into a heightened state of alertness, to prepare us to react adaptively. This also has the effect of compromising the optimal functioning of the prefrontal cortex. Threats do this at three levels of intensity, involving different neural circuitry each time (Mobbs et al., 2007). Understanding these three intensities can help you manage your own and other people’s threat levels more intentionally.  Level 1 threat: Alert but not alarmed  When you are at a level 1 threat, you experience heightened alertness to potential danger, but without feeling alarmed. For example, you discover that you have made a mistake on a project, but your manager and colleagues are not yet aware of it, and you might still have time to fix it. You become more alert to danger cues and less creative, but you can focus well on other types of thinking tasks.  Level 2 threat: Somewhat alarmed  Your brain has registered that danger is close. You begin to feel alarmed, which activates a specific brain network as your body prepares for a fight-or-flight response. The result is significantly impaired perception, cognition, and creativity. A level 2 threat might be activated, say, when you discover that your manager and colleagues are aware of the mistake you have made on a project.  Level 3 threat: Highly alarmed  Survival mode; danger is upon you. This is when you are in a meeting with your manager to discuss the mistake you have made on the project, and they look angry. Now you’re very alarmed, and your body is recruiting all your cognitive resources to fight or flee — making complex thinking all but impossible.  What are some tips to understand my emotions?  Do less: Ignore or suppress emotional responses.  Do more: Recognize and validate emotions as part of the decision-making process.  Do less: React impulsively to negative emotions.  Do more: Pause to assess the underlying cause of emotions and their impact on your behavior.  Do less: Allow stress to dominate your response.  Do more: Employ stress-reduction techniques (e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness) to maintain composure.  Do less: Overlook the importance of emotional cues in others.  Do more: Develop empathy by actively listening and responding to the emotional cues of others.  Do less: Stick solely to logic and rational analysis in conversations.  Do more: Balance logical thinking with emotional intelligence to foster more meaningful interactions.  Do less: View emotional expression as a sign of weakness.  Do more: Appreciate the strength in vulnerability and encourage the expression of genuine emotions.  Do less: Focus on immediately solving the problem when emotions are high.  Do more: Give space for emotions to be acknowledged and understood before moving toward solutions.  This format is designed to enhance emotional intelligence, thus enabling better understanding and management of emotions within oneself and in interactions with others, ultimately contributing to a positive and productive environment conducive to growth.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How do I reduce my level of stress? * How do I know if my levels of stress are healthy or unhealthy? * How do I increase my emotional intelligence?  Scenarios Daiyu’s story:  (Backstory of Daiyu: new nursing manager: goals are to improve the patient outcomes for her floor…what she is adopting from her previous manager into were a few poor months’ #s)  It’s noon on Friday, and Daiyu, a nursing manager, is rushing to complete a weekly patient care report that’s due by 5 p.m. Her mind keeps wandering back to an argument she got into with her wife that morning and how she could have handled the situation differently. Instead she stormed out, needing to get a break from the conflict. She gets increasingly frustrated that she can’t seem to focus on the task at hand. Even when she tries to ignore these feelings, it doesn’t seem to help. Then, one of her nursing interns knocks on her closed office door and, without waiting for an answer, sticks his head in and says, “Hey, boss? I could really use your help with a patient down the hall.” Annoyed and unable to deal with one more problem, Daiyu snaps, “I don’t have time right now. You’re going to have to figure it out yourself.”  Daiyu’s story, take two:  It’s noon on Friday, and Daiyu, a nursing manager, is rushing to complete a weekly patient care report that’s due by 5 p.m. Her mind keeps wandering back to an argument she got into with her wife that morning and how she could have handled the situation differently. Instead she stormed out, needing to get a break from the conflict. She realizes she’s in a Level 2 threat state, and she’s not going to be able to work productively until she can get back down to a manageable Level 1. So she grabs her coffee and heads to the hospital’s rooftop for some fresh air. While there, she calls her wife, apologizes for her part in the argument, and makes plans for dinner at their favorite restaurant. She takes a deep breath, feeling better, and heads back to her office. She sits down and begins typing, confident she can complete the report in a couple of hours. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Individuals often respond to socio-emotional threats with the same intensity as physical threats, leading to impaired judgment, reduced creativity, and difficulty collaborating with others. This fight-or-flight response can be triggered by workplace conflicts or perceived slights, causing unnecessary stress and conflict.  **Solution 1:** Recognize and categorize the intensity of the threat to manage reactions appropriately. By understanding whether a situation represents a Level 1, 2, or 3 threat, individuals can adopt strategies to lower their threat level, such as taking a moment to assess the situation calmly, practicing mindfulness, or seeking supportive feedback to mitigate the perceived threat and restore cognitive functionality.  **Problem 2:** In the face of perceived threats, individuals may experience "tunnel vision," focusing narrowly on the threat at the expense of the bigger picture. This narrowed perception can lead to diminished creativity and an inability to generate innovative solutions or insights.  **Solution 2:** Intentionally shift focus to potential rewards in the environment or situation to balance the brain's threat response. Encourage practices that foster a sense of safety and reward, such as recognizing achievements, focusing on positive outcomes, and cultivating a supportive team environment. This shift can help widen perception, restore higher-level cognitive abilities, and enhance creative thinking.  **Problem 3:** When feeling threatened, individuals are less open to collaboration, as cognitive resources are redirected towards the threat. This can impair teamwork and problem-solving in high-stakes or high-pressure situations, leading to suboptimal outcomes.  **Solution 3:** Create an environment that minimizes socio-emotional threats by promoting psychological safety and inclusion. Implementing team-building activities that emphasize trust, shared goals, and mutual respect can help mitigate the sense of threat. Encouraging open communication and vulnerability without fear of negative consequences allows team members to feel more secure, fostering a collaborative and creative team dynamic even under stress. FAQS | |
| Habit 2: Regulate emotionsSkill 2: Manage distractions Daiyu’s story:  Daiyu is observing one of her newer nurses start an IV in a patient when she feels her phone buzzing in her lab coat pocket. She looks at the screen to see a message from the hospital director, her boss: “Got a minute?” He doesn’t message her like this, so she finds herself distracted at what this could mean and doesn’t notice at first that the nurse is having trouble. When the nurse asks for help, Daiyu quickly types a response to her boss that she’s busy but can talk later. Flustered, she tells the patient they’ll have to try another vein, only to get a frustrated response from the person, who is clearly in pain. The response causes Daiyu to snap, “This time, please don’t move.”  The next week, her boss messages her again to tell her about a patient complaint.  Research  This example of distraction is what it looks like when we’re at a Level 2 or Level 3 threat. It’s very difficult to stop ourselves from becoming overwhelmed and stressed, but there are several ways to pump the brakes, quite literally, on how we’re thinking about things. One way is using a technique called labeling. This involves putting our mental state into just a few words, such as describing our threat level at any moment. This activates an area that we call the brain’s braking system, also found within the prefrontal cortex, that flips the seesaw between the limbic and PFC the other way. If Daiyu used this strategy when her boss messaged her, this would help reengage the prefrontal cortex and she could stop herself from focusing on the message and return to her procedure.  ACTIVITY 1:  Reflect on days when you have back-to-back meetings, versus days when you have few or no meetings. Label your emotions for both.  (Two anonymous word clouds)  Interestingly, trying not to feel something, called suppression, rarely works. Studies show this often makes things worse. Daiyu found she couldn’t just ignore her anxiety because she needed to know what her boss wanted immediately. The key is to summarize the feeling in a single sentence — for example, “This message sent me into a Level 2 threat.” By labeling experiences that trigger a threat throughout the day, we can reverse the seesaw and maximize the capacity of our prefrontal cortex. This is especially helpful when we have a lot to think about, as managers often do.  ACTIVITY 2:  What strategies do you currently use when someone messages you during a meeting or when your direct report stops by your office unannounced?  (Anonymous word cloud)  ACTIONS TO TAKE:  If I’m in a meeting, then I’ll turn off notifications from electronic devices (or better yet, put devices out of sight) so I can focus on the meeting.  If I need time for focused work without interruptions, then I’ll encourage my team to start sharing their calendars, with a clear indication of when they can and can’t be bothered.  If I become distracted by a strong emotion, then I’ll activate my brain’s braking system by summarizing the emotion and the level of threat in a single sentence.  Daiyu’s story, take two:  Daiyu is observing one of her newer nurses start an IV in a patient when she feels her phone buzzing in her lab coat pocket. She looks at the screen to see a message from the hospital director, her boss: “Got a minute?” He doesn’t message her like this, so she finds herself momentarily distracted. When she realizes that her focus has veered, she pauses and labels her emotion as anxiety, which feels like a Level 2 threat. She then tells herself she’s only feeling this way because she’s worried about what her boss wants. This realization allows her to focus on the moment instead of responding immediately to her boss, who can wait until after she finishes the procedure. Resolving to leave her phone at her desk during future training sessions, Daiyu helps the nurse insert the needle correctly in the vein and inject pain medication, allowing the patient to rest comfortably.  **Content**  High-level overview   Skill 5: Manage Distractions, zeroes in on the critical practice of emotional regulation through the strategy of labeling. This skill unveils the counterintuitive effects of suppression, which, though often employed to conceal emotional responses, inadvertently heightens limbic system arousal and increases blood pressure, leading to greater distraction and negatively impacting interpersonal dynamics.  Central to this skill is the technique of labeling, a method that entails succinctly naming emotional states with "feeling words" or metaphors, thereby engaging the brain's braking system—the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (PFC). This process effectively redirects neural resources from the amygdala, a key component of the brain's threat detection apparatus, to the PFC, diminishing emotional arousal and enhancing cognitive control. Through labeling, individuals learn to dampen the limbic system's reactivity, regain focus, and minimize distractions arising from emotional experiences.  Participants will gain insights into the importance of concise labeling.This skill empowers individuals to articulate their emotional states effectively, facilitating a regain of composure and clarity. By mastering labeling, participants can navigate through emotional challenges with enhanced self-awareness and emotional intelligence, leading to improved communication, decision-making, and overall emotional well-being. This is instrumental in fostering a mindful approach to emotional regulation, enabling individuals to manage distractions more effectively and cultivate healthier personal and professional relationships.     Theory Suppression is an attempt to hold down or mask an emotional response. Counterintuitively, this increases our limbic arousal and our blood pressure. It then becomes difficult for us to focus on the conversation because attempting to hide our emotions takes a lot of cognitive effort.  Suppression is when we attempt to hold down or mask an emotional response. Unfortunately, suppression has three unwanted effects: 1) Suppressors feel distracted from the conversation they are trying to have, 2) Their blood pressure goes up, and 3) Their partner’s blood pressure also goes up, suggesting that they can sense what is going on. In short, suppression diminishes the quality of the relationship between parties. Over time, suppression of emotion may have a cumulative effect on one’s cardiovascular health. (Butler, Smith & Gross, 2003.)  Labeling definition  Labeling is a process whereby we represent an emotional response using symbolic language that simplifies the experience. Two common examples are the use of “feeling words” (“I feel unnerved”) or indirect metaphors (“I feel like a ship tossed at sea!”).  One study showed that using words to label emotional faces resulted in less activity in the amygdala — the part of the limbic system that detects significant stimuli with a particular emphasis on those that may be threatening. Instead, the part of the brain activated in this situation was the right ventrolateral PFC, the region that is central to the brain’s braking system and almost all types of inhibition (Lieberman, 2009).  Another study of labeling illustrated a common misconception about the effectiveness of labeling. Participants predicted that voicing negative emotions would make them feel worse, but in fact, it reduced their emotional arousal (Lieberman et al., 2007).  How does labeling work?  The PFC shares resources with brain regions responsible for detecting and responding to threats: the limbic system and amygdala. There is an inverse relationship between these two regions, as if they are on a seesaw. During an emotional response, we can direct resources away from the limbic system by engaging the PFC, thus reducing the level of arousal.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * What is labeling? * How does labeling work? * What happens if I ignore my own stress?  Application How do I label?  It is important to note that telling a detailed story about an emotional event is unlikely to reduce limbic arousal. The key to labeling is to use just a few words or symbols that accurately describe one’s emotional state.  What are some examples of “feeling words” I can use to label emotion?  Angry, disengaged, overwhelmed, nervous, annoyed, embarrassed, anxious, fearful, powerless, confused, frustrated, resentful, conflicted, guilty, skeptical, discouraged, irritated, stressed.  What are some tips to manage distractions by regulating emotion?  Do less: Suppress emotions in the hopes they'll vanish or become irrelevant.  Do more: Identify and label emotions briefly to acknowledge their presence without allowing them to overwhelm.  Do less: Use vague language when identifying emotions.  Do more: Employ specific "feeling words" to accurately label emotions, enhancing clarity and reducing limbic arousal.  Do less: Dive into lengthy narratives about problems that stir emotions.  Do more: Summarize emotional states using succinct labels or symbols to minimize limbic system activation.  Do less: Allow emotions to build up unacknowledged, leading to sudden outbursts.  Do more: Regularly label and discuss emotions in a timely manner to prevent escalation.  Do less: Overlook the impact of stress and anxiety on performance.  Do more: Use concise labeling of stress and anxiety to address and mitigate their effects.  Do less: Consider emotion labeling as a one-time activity.  Do more: Integrate continuous emotion labeling into routines as a practice for emotional regulation and insight.  Do less: Dismiss or trivialize emotions as irrelevant to work.  Do more: Label emotions as they arise to validate feelings and understand their impact on performance.  Do less: Assume emotions are static and unchangeable.  Do more: Recognize that emotions are impermanent.  Do less: React immediately to expressed emotions.  Do more: Pause to label your own emotional response before responding, ensuring a thoughtful dialogue.  Do less: Avoid discussing emotions for fear of vulnerability.  Do more: Encourage the labeling and sharing of emotions to build trust and psychological safety.  This format stresses the nuanced approach to emotion labeling, focusing on the efficient acknowledgment of emotions without delving into detailed narratives that could heighten emotional arousal, thus promoting a calm, collected, and growth-oriented environment.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How can I calm down quickly if I start to get upset or angry? * How can I be less emotional and more rational? * What is a technique to reduce my stress levels?  Scenarios Daiyu’s story:  Daiyu is observing one of her newer nurses start an IV in a patient when she feels her phone buzzing in her lab coat pocket. She looks at the screen to see a message from the hospital director, her boss: “Got a minute?” He doesn’t message her like this, so she finds herself distracted at what this could mean and doesn’t notice at first that the nurse is having trouble. When the nurse asks for help, Daiyu quickly types a response to her boss that she’s busy but can talk later. Flustered, she tells the patient they’ll have to try another vein, only to get a frustrated response from the person, who is clearly in pain. The response causes Daiyu to snap, “This time, please don’t move.”  The next week, her boss messages her again to tell her about a patient complaint.  Daiyu’s story, take two:  Daiyu is observing one of her newer nurses start an IV in a patient when she feels her phone buzzing in her lab coat pocket. She looks at the screen to see a message from the hospital director, her boss: “Got a minute?” He doesn’t message her like this, so she finds herself momentarily distracted. When she realizes that her focus has veered, she pauses and labels her emotion as anxiety, which feels like a Level 2 threat. She then tells herself she’s only feeling this way because she’s worried about what her boss wants. This realization allows her to focus on the moment instead of responding immediately to her boss, who can wait until after she finishes the procedure. Resolving to leave her phone at her desk during future training sessions, Daiyu helps the nurse insert the needle correctly in the vein and inject pain medication, allowing the patient to rest comfortably. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Attempting to suppress emotional responses can inadvertently increase limbic system arousal and blood pressure, resulting in greater cognitive distraction and diminished focus during crucial tasks or interactions.  **Solution 1:** Instead of suppressing emotions, practice labeling them using concise words or metaphors. This strategy redirects neural activity from the amygdala to the prefrontal cortex, effectively reducing emotional arousal and helping to regain focus and clarity in thoughts and actions.  **Problem 2:** Suppression not only affects the individual’s focus and health but also leads to increased blood pressure in both the individual and their conversational partner, suggesting a mutual perception of emotional tension that can erode the quality of relationships.  **Solution 2:** Foster open communication environments where individuals feel safe to express their emotions through labeling. This openness can decrease the physiological responses associated with suppression, thereby improving relationship dynamics and reducing the collective stress levels during interactions.  **Problem 3:** The effort to mask emotions diverts cognitive resources, impairing higher-level processes necessary for effective problem-solving and decision-making, particularly under stress.  **Solution 3:** Implement a practice of immediate emotional labeling in stressful situations to engage the brain’s braking system, thereby freeing up cognitive resources for higher-level thinking. This approach enhances decision-making capabilities by ensuring that emotional arousal does not overwhelm rational thought processes, leading to more considered and effective outcomes. FAQS | |
| Habit 2: Regulate emotionsSkill 3: Shift perspective Daiyu’s story:  It’s Friday afternoon, and Daiyu is exhausted. She feels like she’s been running on empty since Wednesday. Perhaps that wouldn’t be an issue, except her team is also exhausted, and her lack of energy seems to be rubbing off on them. She wishes she could be more upbeat, but she feels like she’s constantly putting out fires. In addition to managing nurses, she’s also still looking after patients, and people’s lives literally depend on her, which adds to the pressure she feels.  All of a sudden, an emergency happens in one of the wards, and she jumps to attention, adrenaline pumping through her veins. This Level 2 threat helps her get moving, literally pumping more oxygen into her extremities and into the motor cortex in her brain, which helps drive quick and determined movements. But this response to threat also means there are less resources for her prefrontal cortex, which results in her not clearly hearing a patient explain their level of pain. The patient gets upset when she feels ignored, and this makes Daiyu more frustrated. The situation escalates to the point where a teammate has to come in and sedate the patient. Daiyu doesn’t know this yet, but the situation will result in difficulties for her career going forward.  Research  Like many people, Daiyu relies on an adrenaline rush to help her get through emergencies. This isn’t a bad strategy if emergencies are rare and short-lived, but it can have long-term side effects, such as overall reduced health, if used regularly. When a situation is more of a marathon than a sprint, this kind of strategy becomes ineffective because the effects don’t last.  ACTIVITY 1:  How many times a week does adrenaline get you through a challenge?  0  1-3 times  4-7 times  More than 7 times  In the presence of Level 2 or Level 3 threats, research suggests there is one strategy that works best over the long term: reappraisal. Reappraisal involves altering our interpretation of events to something more positive or productive. The technique is based on research showing that our interpretation of our surroundings defines our emotional response. For example, if we see an obstacle ahead at work, reappraisal is the difference between us deciding if it’s too much to take on or an opportunity to show leadership. The process of reappraisal involves a few steps:  Notice the presence of a strong emotion.  Lightly label your current interpretation and the resulting emotional response.  Choose or develop a new positive interpretation to focus on.  Studies show that when we do this, we activate the brain’s braking system which reduces the engagement of the limbic system, bringing our overall threat response down.  ACTIVITY 2:  Choose from one of these and interpret it differently:  Being stressed about a new team member who seems to think differently than you.  Feeling concerned that you’re taking on a big, new project.  Feeling anxious about having to reduce the number of people on your team.  Being nervous to take a break from work to manage a health issue.  Sometimes a threat response kicks in that’s too strong for reappraisal alone. Perhaps it’s a life-changing situation — being laid off when you didn’t see it coming or learning a loved one was in a car crash. In this case, you might need more of a biological intervention to help with the effect of reappraisal, such as a power walk or run to work out the excess adrenaline and cortisol. Or, you may need a nap or good night’s sleep to regenerate and recover. There are times that cognitive strategies alone won't work, and we need to take better care of our basic health to get back to a good mental state. We’ll learn more about how to do this later.  ACTIVITY 3:  What kind of strategy do you use now when a very strong emotion kicks in? Order from most used to least used.  None. I yell and scream, and things escalate.  I retreat and try not to feel anything.  I exercise to get the energy out.  I take a nap.  I eat something.  Now reorder these in what you might like to do differently, going forward.  None, I yell and scream, and things escalate.  I retreat and try not to feel anything.  I exercise to get the energy out.  I take a nap.  I eat something.  ACTIONS TO TAKE:  If I’m tempted to act on an adrenaline rush, I’ll pause, breathe, and tell myself that such a strategy will leave me feeling more depleted and prone to mistakes.  If I’m facing a challenging situation, I’ll practice reappraisal and reframe the situation into something positive or productive.  If the situation I’m facing causes a strong threat response and reappraisal doesn’t work, I’ll try a biological intervention, such as exercise, sleep, or a good meal.  Daiyu’s story, take two:  It’s Friday afternoon, and Daiyu is tired, but she tells herself the weekend is right around the corner and will give her time to regenerate. This helps her feel more positive as she approaches her work. Her team relies on her positive energy to get through this last shift, and she motivates them with her upbeat attitude.  Suddenly, an emergency happens in one of the wards, and she jumps to attention. But instead of running on adrenaline, she reappraises the situation as an opportunity to show her team how to stay calm under pressure. She addresses the emergency, taking care to listen closely to the patient, and gives them the appropriate pain medications. She then debriefs with her team about the lessons learned. When she finally wraps her shift, exhausted, she goes home and spends Friday night having a balanced meal and going to bed early so she can wake up energized to spend Saturday with friends and family.  **Content:** High-level overview Skill 6: Shift Perspective (Reappraisal), focuses on using cognitive reappraisal to alter emotional responses by changing the interpretation of a situation. This technique involves seeing circumstances in a more positive light or from a perspective that promotes greater understanding, thereby modifying both the emotional impact and its significance.  Participants will be provided with strategies and questions to aid in the reappraisal process. These strategies are designed to encourage reflection on personal reactions, consider alternative viewpoints, and identify growth opportunities from challenges.  This skill aims to enhance emotional intelligence and resilience by teaching participants to actively reframe their perspectives, leading to improved emotional regulation, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. By mastering reappraisal, individuals gain a powerful tool for navigating emotional challenges with intention and insight. Theory Reappraisal definition  Cognitive reappraisal is a strategy that draws on cognitive control and executive functioning to change the meaning and emotional valence of a situation. Another definition of reappraisal: See a situation in a more positive light or in a way that gives greater understanding. When we reappraise, we change the meaning of a situation, as well as its emotional power.  What is the research behind reappraisal?  The concept is well illustrated by an experiment in which participants were shown a photo of people crying outside a church, which naturally made them feel sad. They were then asked to imagine the scene as a wedding, with people crying tears of joy. Due to this instruction, participants started feeling joy instead of sadness. In other words, changing their thinking changed their emotional response (Ochsner & Gross, 2005).  Why use reappraisal?  Reappraisal is more effective than labeling for regulating strong emotions, but it does require more cognitive resources.  What are some types of reappraisal?  At a high level, we can think of reappraisal questions in two categories: detached reappraisal and positive reappraisal.  Detached reappraisal is like turning down the volume on the television. Positive reappraisal is like changing the channel on a television. An example of detached reappraisal is acceptance - acknowledging that emotions are fleeting experiences that are separate to the ”self” — a strategy central to many meditation practices. An example of positive reappraisal is to ask yourself how a difficult situation might present an opportunity for growth.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * What is reappraisal? * How does reappraisal work? * When should I choose reappraisal over labeling?  Application How do I reappraise a situation for myself?  Here are some reappraisal questions to ask yourself. You could write down the answers, or discuss your answers with someone else.   * “How normal do you think your feelings about this situation are?” * “What do you think an appropriate response to this situation would be?” * “Do you think your reaction to this situation is too strong, too weak, or about right?” * “If you could zoom out and look at this issue from afar, what might you notice?” * “Imagine your future self 20 years from now; what would you say to your present self?” * “What might this situation look like from the other person’s point of view?” * “What advice would you give a friend in this situation?” * “What suggestions might one of your personal role models give about this?” * “How could you think about this situation differently?” * “If you had nothing to lose, how might you approach this challenge?” * “Which benefits or positive side effects might the situation give you?” * “What perspective could you adopt that would support you moving forward?” * How could you think about this issue from a different perspective? * Can you describe this issue as an image or picture? * Have you ever tried an alternative approach? What were the results? * If this was your manager dealing with this issue, how do you think they would deal with it? What would they do? * If this was a personal relationship rather than a work relationship, how would you handle it differently? * What do you think the other person might be feeling regarding this issue? * If you could observe this situation from a third person point-of-view, what do you think you would see? * How can you look at this issue differently? * What is a different perspective you could have regarding this issue? * How might you think differently about this? * Would you be willing to explore another perspective on this current situation? * If you could zoom out and look at this issue from afar, what would you notice? * If this were a friend telling you their story, what would you be saying to them to help them reframe it? * Imagine you are your future self, 20 years from now, what would you say to your present self? * If you had a choice, what would you do? * Let’s pretend we are in a theater and run this situation as a movie. You’re sitting in the audience watching the move. What do you see? * If you had nothing to lose, what would you do differently? * Are your beliefs in this area based on facts?   APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How can I calm down quickly if I start to get upset or angry? * How can I be less emotional and more rational? * What is a technique to reduce my stress levels? * How do I shift my perspective from negative to positive?   What are some tips to regulate emotion with reappraisal?  Do less: Automatically accept initial emotional reactions as the only truth.  Do more: Use reappraisal to question and shift your interpretation of events, leading to different emotional outcomes.  Do less: View stressful events as purely negative experiences that must be endured.  Do more: Reappraise stress as an opportunity to build resilience and develop coping strategies.  Do less: Let negative emotions from feedback affect self-esteem and motivation.  Do more: Reinterpret feedback through reappraisal to focus on growth opportunities and reduce emotional distress.  Do less: Perceive conflicts as personal attacks.  Do more: Employ reappraisal to understand conflicts as misunderstandings or differences in perspective.  Do less: See change as a threat to stability and comfort.  Do more: Reappraise change as a chance to learn new skills and adapt, viewing it as an exciting challenge.  Do less: Hold onto the feeling of failure after a setback.  Do more: Use reappraisal to redefine setbacks as essential steps toward mastery and innovation.  Do less: Become overwhelmed by emotions in high-pressure situations.  Do more: Actively engage in reappraisal to assess situations more objectively, maintaining emotional balance and effectiveness.  These tips focus on the power of cognitive reappraisal in regulating emotions, encouraging a shift in perspective that leads to healthier emotional responses and enhanced emotional well-being in the workplace. Scenarios Daiyu’s story:  It’s Friday afternoon, and Daiyu is exhausted. She feels like she’s been running on empty since Wednesday. Perhaps that wouldn’t be an issue, except her team is also exhausted, and her lack of energy seems to be rubbing off on them. She wishes she could be more upbeat, but she feels like she’s constantly putting out fires. In addition to managing nurses, she’s also still looking after patients, and people’s lives literally depend on her, which adds to the pressure she feels.  All of a sudden, an emergency happens in one of the wards, and she jumps to attention, adrenaline pumping through her veins. This Level 2 threat helps her get moving, literally pumping more oxygen into her extremities and into the motor cortex in her brain, which helps drive quick and determined movements. But this response to threat also means there are less resources for her prefrontal cortex, which results in her not clearly hearing a patient explain their level of pain. The patient gets upset when she feels ignored, and this makes Daiyu more frustrated. The situation escalates to the point where a teammate has to come in and sedate the patient. Daiyu doesn’t know this yet, but the situation will result in difficulties for her career going forward.  Daiyu’s story, take two:  It’s Friday afternoon, and Daiyu is tired, but she tells herself the weekend is right around the corner and will give her time to regenerate. This helps her feel more positive as she approaches her work. Her team relies on her positive energy to get through this last shift, and she motivates them with her upbeat attitude.  Suddenly, an emergency happens in one of the wards, and she jumps to attention. But instead of running on adrenaline, she reappraises the situation as an opportunity to show her team how to stay calm under pressure. She addresses the emergency, taking care to listen closely to the patient, and gives them the appropriate pain medications. She then debriefs with her team about the lessons learned. When she finally wraps her shift, exhausted, she goes home and spends Friday night having a balanced meal and going to bed early so she can wake up energized to spend Saturday with friends and family. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Individuals often find themselves overwhelmed by negative emotions when faced with stressful situations, which can cloud judgment and impede effective decision-making.  **Solution 1:** Practice positive reappraisal by identifying aspects of the situation that could be seen in a positive light or as opportunities for growth. This reframing can help transform overwhelming negative emotions into more manageable, even positive feelings, thereby improving clarity and decision-making.  **Problem 2:** Getting stuck in a single, often negative perspective can limit problem-solving abilities and hinder creative thinking, making it hard to see potential solutions.  **Solution 2:** Employ detached reappraisal techniques, such as imagining how the situation might look from another person's point of view or considering the advice you would give to a friend. This can help break the fixation on a single perspective, opening up new avenues for problem-solving and creative thinking.  **Problem 3:** Strong emotional reactions to challenging situations can trigger the brain's threat-responsive circuitry, making it difficult to think clearly and respond effectively.  **Solution 3:** Use reappraisal questions to challenge and change your initial emotional responses. Asking yourself how your future self might view the situation or exploring what you might notice if you zoomed out to look at the issue from afar can help dampen immediate emotional reactions, facilitating a more measured and constructive response. FAQS | |
| Habit 3: Sustain good thinkingSkill 1: Know my drivers *(Light SCARF) (SCARF assessment)* Javier backstory: newly promoted manager at a tech company- not only is he leading a group of people but also has to stay in the details of coding the software-and pressure to put out a new product  Javier’s story:  Javier, a newly promoted manager at a technology company, and his team have been hard at work coding software for a new product launch at his tech company. They’ve been putting in long hours for weeks to get the software ready in time for the launch, but they’re starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. That is, until Serena, an employee fresh out of college, comes to Javier with a problem: She’s discovered an error in Javier’s coding that will set them back at least a couple more days. Javier feels mortified that he made a mistake — although not really surprised, since he’s been feeling stressed and not getting enough sleep — but even more mortified that a junior employee discovered the error. It briefly crosses his mind to shift blame elsewhere, but instead, he decides to play it cool: “Ok, Serena, I’m sure I would have caught that when I went back and checked my work this afternoon, but thanks.” He ushers her out of his office, closes the door, and begins fixing his mistake.  Research  Javier is discovering something we mentioned earlier: Social threats and rewards tend to pack a powerful punch. The SCARF® Model describes five key domains of social threat and reward: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. Status stems from feeling valued and respected. Certainty stems from our need to predict the future. Autonomy is our need to feel in control. Relatedness is how connected we feel to others, and fairness stems from our need to feel equally treated.  When Serena pointed out Javier’s mistake, he felt a major threat to his status as a manager. He may also have felt threats to certainty (when will the project be completed now?), autonomy (was Serena constantly checking up on him?), relatedness (he feels less connected to Serena because he’s embarrassed about his mistake), and fairness (he’s been working much longer hours than anyone else on this project — no wonder he made an error).  When we interact with others, we tend to minimize potential SCARF® threats. For example, we protect our status by not taking risks so we don’t make mistakes in front of others. Or we tend to avoid change in a process because it creates uncertainty. This is also why we dislike when people tell us what to do, as it can activate a threat to our sense of autonomy.  At the same time, we’re driven to find ways to maximize SCARF® rewards where we can. For example, when we take on a complex project and break it into smaller steps, we increase our sense of certainty that we will reach our goals. Or when we feel overwhelmed but have the freedom to choose what task to prioritize, this increases our sense of autonomy. Finally, when we connect with others and achieve things together, we’re increasing our sense of relatedness.  In a large-scale survey undertaken by the NeuroLeadership Group, we found that individuals vary on the specific domains within SCARF that they feel most motivated by— both in terms of reducing threats and increasing rewards. What we've found in our own research is that we're all motivated differently across these domains, so it's even more important to figure out which domains, and in which contexts these domains drive your behavior.  ACTIVITY 1:  -Which of the SCARF® domains do you predict will be most important to you?  Anonymous  -Now take the SCARF® Assessment and compare that to what you predicted.  -List one decision you made in life based on this driver. For example, what’s one way you live your life or do your work that’s driven by that SCARF® domain?  SCARF® is also a way to think about how to engage others based on what motivates them, which we’ll come back to later in this journey. For now let’s focus on using SCARF® to motivate yourself.  Just like we learned to label threat levels, you can use SCARF® to label what type of threat you’re feeling at the moment. For example, if someone says your idea is wrong during a meeting, you might feel your status is attacked and react angrily. Instead, by noticing this status threat, you can turn down the negative emotional response and react more reflectively instead of reflexively. In some cases, you can use SCARF® to reappraise your feelings: Maybe you felt a status threat when a team member challenged your idea, but you can reappraise it as a fairness reward when you realize you’re being treated the same as everyone else.  ACTIVITY 2:  Which SCARF® domain(s) might be playing out in each of these scenarios?  Someone attacks your idea in a meeting.  Someone treats you differently than another person.  You feel like someone is competing with you on a project.  You’re not sure of someone’s goals.  Someone gives you detailed instructions for a task and checks to make sure you’ve completed each step.  One of the first ways to use SCARF® is to understand your own profile and leverage it as you design your life: working to minimize SCARF® threats and maximize SCARF® rewards. Research shows that we’re motivated most by goals that activate intrinsic reward networks through a process called “assimilation.” For example, striving for a sales target motivates us because of the status reward we get from being recognized for meeting the goal. Going for a promotion might give us a boost in every SCARF® domain: status (being a manager), autonomy (having more control), certainty (having access to higher-level information), fairness (if you feel you deserved it), and relatedness (if it connects you more closely to your team members). SCARF® preferences may vary in different social contexts or even as we develop in a role, so it’s important to reassess your profile often. If you know which domains drive you in specific circumstances, you can design ways to have more rewarding experiences in any situation.  ACTIVITY 3:  Name one way you can reduce a potential threat from your main SCARF® domain and increase a reward. For example, if it’s autonomy, how might you ask your leader for more flexibility in how you execute tasks?  (See each other’s answers)  A big reason all of this “motivating yourself” stuff matters is that as a manager, you’ll experience many potential threats, simply from having too much to do, managing more people and their personalities, facing lots of uncertainty, and being observed by others more often. SCARF® gives you a powerful tool to reduce the threats you experience, as well as increase the rewards you feel. This will help you stay in more of a toward state, which is critical for maximizing your cognitive capacity and quality of insights. In short, staying more optimistic will make you a more effective leader.  A second reason SCARF® is important is that your team can easily interpret whether you’re in a toward or away state. This is called emotional resonance, and it occurs independent of words or language, based on the tone of voice or body language we notice from people around us with higher status. Using SCARF® as a tool, you can keep yourself in a toward state, which will help everyone do their best work.  ACTIONS TO TAKE:  If I feel unhappy about something a co-worker says or does, I’ll ask myself which SCARF® domain is being threatened.  If I’m meeting with other leaders and feel a threat to my status (e.g., i'm not feeling heard), I’ll reappraise the situation and send myself a status reward instead (e.g., I have a seat at the table).  If I’m meeting with a team member who I don’t know very well, and they seem standoffish, I’ll find ways to increase the sense of relatedness.  Javier’s story, take two:  Javier and his team have been hard at work coding software for a new product launch at his tech company. When Serena, an employee fresh out of college, points out a mistake Javier made in his coding, he’s initially mortified. But then, he takes a deep breath and realizes he’s feeling a threat to his status from this junior team member. In his mind, he reappraises the situation: It’s far better the mistake was discovered now than later, and he’s happy that Serena felt enough psychological safety to come to him with the problem. He says, “Great job spotting that mistake, Serena! Can you help me fix it? Between the two of us, I think we can get it done quickly.” At the next team meeting, Javier publicly thanks Serena for discovering the error, saving them all a lot of time and trouble.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 7: Know My Drivers introduces participants to the SCARF® Model, a framework designed to enhance understanding of one’s intrinsic social motivators within the workplace and beyond. This model identifies five key domains—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—that universally influence human behavior and interactions by triggering either 'toward' (reward) or 'away' (threat) responses. By exploring these domains, individuals gain insights into how social triggers impact their emotions and actions, offering a powerful lens through which to view both personal motivations and interpersonal dynamics.  Participants will engage with the SCARF assessment to identify their primary social drivers, fostering a deeper self-awareness and enabling them to tailor their environments to better suit these drivers, thus enhancing performance and satisfaction. The skill provides practical strategies for creating "SCARF buffers," or rewards, within each domain to mitigate social threats and amplify rewards. For example, recognizing personal achievements to boost status, or establishing routines for enhanced certainty.  This skill empowers individuals to navigate social systems more effectively by understanding and leveraging their unique SCARF profiles. It encourages a proactive approach to managing social threats and rewards, aiming to improve personal resilience, enhance interpersonal relationships, and foster a more engaging and productive work environment. Through the application of SCARF insights, participants learn to align their actions with their core social drivers, optimizing their response to challenges and opportunities alike. Theory As humans we are highly attuned to social/relational concerns. As soon as we are not thinking about a specific task, our attention is often redirected to thinking about the self and others—for example, “How did that person react to what I said?” and so on. We are incredibly driven by social threats and rewards. Social rewards are things like praise, or a sense of belonging. Social threats are things like being humiliated in front of our colleagues, or not understanding a joke. Social threat and reward are experienced with similar intensity as physical threat and reward.  The purpose of The SCARF® Model is to provide an easy way to remember, and therefore, act upon the social triggers that can generate both toward and away responses. This is important in the workplace, because the human brain deals with the workplace as a social system, first and foremost. The SCARF® Model is made up of five domains: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. These five domains appear to be universal drivers for all human beings. Understanding these five domains as primary needs helps individuals and leaders better navigate the social environment in the workplace (Rock & Cox, 2012).  The “S”, Status, is about our perception of whether we are less than or better than others. Every time we are in a group we rank ourselves against everyone else. This happens non-consciously and automatically. Are we at the top, in the middle or near the bottom? We each have different measures for status, depending on who we are, and the context: intelligence, talent, salary, how influential we are, how valued we are, even how funny we are.  The “C” stands for Certainty and refers to our need to predict outcomes or events. The brain is a prediction machine. It uses our past experiences to understand our present situation. It is trying to predict outcomes all the time in order to minimise threat and keep us safe.  When things are familiar, we experience a reward state. When things are unfamiliar or even ambiguous we experience a threat state. Any change, even if positive, can create a threat response, as it triggers uncertainty.  “A” stands for Autonomy and refers to our need for control—to perceive that we have choices or options. Having autonomy is rewarding, and taking away options creates a threat response. Think about the difference in motivation between “volunteering” and “being voluntold”. Think about what it’s like to be micromanaged, what that does to your feeling of engagement. Our need for autonomy varies depending on the situation. New hires need less, senior people need more. People with autonomy as a strong driver often like being in charge, or getting minimal supervision.  The “R” is Relatedness, our sense of safety or connection with others. It is about in-group or out-group, enemy or ally, friend or foe. Just as our brain automatically determines our status in a group, it also non-consciously decides whether people are trustworthy or not.  When we see someone as part of our in-group, we process their thoughts and experience almost the same way we process our own thoughts and experiences.  The opposite is true for people we assign to our ‘out-group’. We find it hard to listen to their point of view or take in their suggestions. We find it easy to find fault with them. Because bad is stronger than good, our default is to put people in the out group. People who are strongly driven by relatedness are the ones who want to know how you are, how your family is, and so on.  “F” stands for Fairness and represents our need to feel we have been treated equitably. Your bonus can feel really rewarding until you find out someone in a similar role has received something even slightly bigger. This can create a threat response that lasts for days, months or even longer.  Just witnessing someone else being treated unfairly can trigger a strong fairness threat. Perception is important here. If people can see a transparent process was followed they are more likely to feel they were treated fairly, even if they don’t like the outcome. This is known as procedural fairness.  SCARF® “buffers” are strategies we can put in place in order to put us in a more positive overall state. Think of them as a "cushion" that helps reduce the impact of threats. Adopting these buffering strategies can help you to avoid depletion and focus better as a leader.  **My Assessment result doesn’t fit how I see myself. Could it be wrong?**  The SCARF® Assessment is the result of a year-long research project. That said, no test is perfect. Feel free to share what you believe your strongest driver is if it is different from your test result. Consider also if you might be rejecting your result because you have a negative perception of your strongest driver. For example, some people who score high in Status are worried that this means they are egotistical. In fact, they place high importance on feeling respected and valued, which is a normal social need.  **Can a person’s SCARF® preferences change?**  Yes, our context or situation can impact how strongly we value each of the SCARF® social drivers. For example, if we are going through a significant organizational change, we might experience a higher than usual need for Certainty. Or, we might generally have a stronger need for Relatedness at home that we do at work.  **Does SCARF® vary due to different cultural backgrounds? Should I change my approach based on this?**  While human culture varies a lot, the way in which the brain is constantly scanning the environment for potential threat and reward is universal. Culture does cause variations, e.g. what is considered unfair in one culture might be normal in another. However, there is usually greater variation within a culture than across cultures. Identifying cultural themes or patterns can be helpful in the absence of other information, but the best results are achieved when we ask, observe, and listen, rather than assume.  **THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS**   * My SCARF assessment results don’t fit how I see myself. Could they be wrong? * Are my SCARF preferences stable or can they change over time? * What does it mean if my SCARF needs are equal in more than one domain?  Application **How can I create SCARF rewards for myself?**  Status buffers/rewards for self:   * Notice your wins and successes, even small ones. For an extra status boost, share them with others. * Look for opportunities to apply your skills and strengths. Doing things you do well will remind you of your competence, and your unique strengths. * Recognize the efforts you are making, and record your progress. This can help you notice the value you are adding.   Certainty buffers/rewards for self:   * Prioritize prioritizing: Prioritizing is cognitively taxing: do it when your brain is fresh. For most of us, this is when we are rested, usually in the morning. Our prefrontal cortex can only hold a few things at once. Prioritizing combats overwhelm. We suggest a rule of three at NLI – this is manageable for the brain. Get clear on your top 3 tasks for the day, your top 3 projects for the week or the month, and perhaps even your top three goals for the year. * Schedule your day to create order. Some of us prefer a flexible schedule, some of us find a more detailed schedule gives us a rewarding sense of certainty, but some kind of schedule is usually helpful. A regular daily routine can give us a sense of certainty as well. * When you can’t get certainty, you can ask questions to gain clarity. Clarity from senior leadership about the end goal or the vision can be helpful, even if you don't yet know how to get there. As a manager we want to know our team are on track, but we don't want to micromanage them because of our own need for certainty. To get clarity, try asking them high level questions like, "What support do you need to succeed on this project?"   Autonomy buffers/rewards for self:   * When worries or concerns are taking over it can be helpful to map out what you can control versus what you can't. * Self care is one area where we can make choices. You might want to create a morning or evening routine around self-care activities. * We have a certain amount of choice about our mindset and attitudes. Choose to adopt a growth mindset by focusing on progress you are making. Gratitude lists can be an effective way to shift from a negative attitude to a more positive frame of mind. * Choosing to respond rather than react (whenever we are able to so), can provide us with a sense of control. To guide us on how we want to respond, it can be helpful to connect to our personal vision and values.   Relatedness buffers/rewards for self:   * Even when you are busy or overwhelmed, try to plan quality time with people you like and trust. * Find the fun – laughing releases feel good chemicals and helps us feel connected. * Giving to others makes us feel good and builds connection, and so does asking for help! We often feel uncomfortable asking, but when we think about how good it feels to be asked for help, it can feel a lot easier.   Fairness buffers/rewards for self:   * If we are feeling hard done by, or if we are resenting others for getting more than us, considering their perspective can help us to see that others might be struggling too, or that there is another side of the story. This can reduce our sense of threat. * If your workload is overwhelming, hold your boundaries to protect yourself from shouldering more than your share of the burden. When we act as a martyr it can leave us feeling resentful. * Practicing gratitude reminds us of what we have, as a way to offset our natural tendency to focus on what isn't fair.   **What are some tips to know my drivers?**  Do less: Remain unaware of what specifically motivates or demotivates you in workplace interactions.  Do more: Actively use the SCARF® assessment to identify your personal drivers in the domains of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.  Do less: Ignore how SCARF® domains impact your reaction to change and challenge.  Do more: Refer to your SCARF® assessment results to understand how various situations can increase or decrease your engagement and well-being.  Do less: Overlook the influence of SCARF® drivers on your communication style.  Do more: Leverage knowledge of your SCARF® drivers to tailor your communication in ways that reduce threat and enhance engagement for yourself and others.  Do less: Treat all feedback equally, without considering your SCARF® profile.  Do more: Interpret feedback through the lens of your SCARF® profile, to better manage emotional responses and foster constructive outcomes.  Do less: Assume that your SCARF® drivers are static and unchanging across contexts.  Do more: Regularly reassess your SCARF® drivers as your role, tasks, or environment evolves, to stay in tune with your motivations.  Do less: Conduct team meetings and project planning without considering your SCARF® drivers.  Do more: Apply insights from your SCARF® assessment to structure team interactions and projects in ways that play to your strengths and mitigate threats.  Do less: Make decisions without self-awareness of how SCARF® elements influence your choices.  Do more: Use awareness of your SCARF® drivers to make more informed, balanced decisions by recognizing when and how your buttons are being pushed.  This set of guidelines is crafted to help individuals leverage the SCARF® model for insightful self-assessment and practical application, resulting in improved understanding and management of their social drivers in workplace contexts.  **APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS**   * How can I use SCARF to lower my stress levels? * My job is very chaotic but I need a lot of certainty; what can I do? * Can I reduce my need for SCARF rewards in a certain domain?  Scenarios Javier backstory: newly promoted manager at a tech company- not only is he leading a group of people but also has to stay in the details of coding the software-and pressure to put out a new product  Javier’s story:  Javier, a newly promoted manager at a technology company, and his team have been hard at work coding software for a new product launch at his tech company. They’ve been putting in long hours for weeks to get the software ready in time for the launch, but they’re starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. That is, until Serena, an employee fresh out of college, comes to Javier with a problem: She’s discovered an error in Javier’s coding that will set them back at least a couple more days. Javier feels mortified that he made a mistake — although not really surprised, since he’s been feeling stressed and not getting enough sleep — but even more mortified that a junior employee discovered the error. It briefly crosses his mind to shift blame elsewhere, but instead, he decides to play it cool: “Ok, Serena, I’m sure I would have caught that when I went back and checked my work this afternoon, but thanks.” He ushers her out of his office, closes the door, and begins fixing his mistake.  Javier’s story, take two:  Javier and his team have been hard at work coding software for a new product launch at his tech company. When Serena, an employee fresh out of college, points out a mistake Javier made in his coding, he’s initially mortified. But then, he takes a deep breath and realizes he’s feeling a threat to his status from this junior team member. In his mind, he reappraises the situation: It’s far better the mistake was discovered now than later, and he’s happy that Serena felt enough psychological safety to come to him with the problem. He says, “Great job spotting that mistake, Serena! Can you help me fix it? Between the two of us, I think we can get it done quickly.” At the next team meeting, Javier publicly thanks Serena for discovering the error, saving them all a lot of time and trouble. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** An individual might feel undervalued or overlooked, triggering a negative status response and impacting motivation and engagement.  **Solution 1:** To address this challenge, individuals can seek opportunities to highlight their own successes and contributions, even in small ways. Sharing achievements with colleagues or supervisors can provide a status boost, reminding oneself and others of the value added to the team. Recognizing one's own efforts and progress can also reinforce a sense of competence and achievement.  **Problem 2:** Organizational changes can create a high level of uncertainty, leading to stress and a threat response due to a lack of predictability about future outcomes.  **Solution 2:** Implementing certainty buffers can mitigate this challenge. Prioritizing tasks and establishing a clear daily routine can offer a sense of order and predictability. Seeking clarity from leadership about the vision or end goals, even if the path to get there is not fully defined, can also reduce the threat response, helping individuals navigate change more comfortably.  **Problem 3:** Remote work can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection, challenging the relatedness aspect of the SCARF model.  **Solution 3:** To enhance a sense of connection and belonging, individuals can proactively schedule regular check-ins and quality time with colleagues. Engaging in activities that foster laughter and shared experiences can boost relatedness. Additionally, offering help to others or asking for assistance when needed can strengthen social bonds, making remote work feel more inclusive and connected. FAQS | |
| Habit 3: Sustain good thinkingSkill 2: Get more resilient *(Healthy Mind Platter)* Javier’s story:  Lately, Javier feels like all he’s been doing for weeks is work and has found it difficult to stay in a toward state. Since being promoted to manager, he hasn’t had time to exercise, socialize with friends and family, or even get enough sleep. The pressure of getting the new product ready to launch has been constantly on his mind, and he feels like he can’t take a break; it feels like a huge weight on his shoulders. As a result, he feels tired, overly sensitive, and irritable. Just the other day, a colleague joked with him about the stock art he used in a presentation, and he snapped back with an over-the-top retort. Later, he yelled at a team member who asked for clarification on the project’s next steps. He knows in the back of his mind that if he builds more resilience, these little requests and jabs won’t drive him over the edge, but he’s unsure how to do so and how he’ll fit it into any of his busy days.  Research  When we’re in a toward or away state, we can easily spiral up or down as our environment changes. If we’re in a positive state, a negative situation like someone making a snide comment might bring us back to feeling neutral. But if we start the day already stressed, or in an away state, that comment might tip us over the edge and lead us directly into a higher threat state. For managers, keeping yourself in a toward state with a buffer — in other words, building resilience — before you even start to experience stressors is important.  One way to do this is by using what we call the Healthy Mind Platter. This tool provides the seven types of activities your brain needs throughout the week to maintain optimal condition. The amount of each activity needed will vary with the person, but everyone needs at least some of each activity in a given week to build resilience. Like a plant that gets too much sunshine and not enough water, our brains won’t thrive without balance.  The seven activities are sleep; focus (getting mental or physical work done); play (inviting novelty into your life); connecting time (social time with others); downtime (being non-goal focused); time in (for reflection, meditation, mindfulness, or prayer); and physical time (exercise).  ACTIVITY 1:  Of the seven activities, which ones did you NOT get enough of in the past week?  Sleep  Focus  Play  Connecting time  Downtime  Time in  Physical time  (WORD CLOUD)  While it’s difficult to fit all seven activities into a day or even a week, one way to help with this obstacle is to combine activities. While you can’t combine sleep time with much, you can combine physical time with focus time, for example, by taking walking meetings. Research shows that walking while focusing on a task can improve your thinking. Or you might combine play, connecting time, and physical time by getting friends together for a fun, lighthearted sport. Try not to connect downtime to anything, though; we tend to do downtime all wrong because in order to get the benefits, we need to let our mind wander without focusing on anything.  ACTIVITY 2:  What kinds of doubling-up or combined activities could you imagine adding to your week?  (Open field)  ACTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If I feel overwhelmed or irritable, I’ll think about which component(s) of the Healthy Mind Platter I might be missing. * If I feel overwhelmed or irritable, then I'll think about which Healthy Mind Platter components I can leverage more than I usually do and make time for it. * If I don’t have time to work all the activities into my schedule on their own, I’ll figure out how to double- or triple-up.   Javier’s story, take two:  Lately, Javier feels like all he’s been doing for weeks is work and has found it difficult to stay in a toward state. Since being promoted to manager, he hasn’t had time to exercise, socialize with friends and family, or even get enough sleep. The pressure of getting the new product ready to launch has been constantly on his mind, and he feels like he can’t take a break; it feels like a huge weight on his shoulders. As a result, he feels tired, overly sensitive, and irritable. Just the other day, a colleague joked with him about the stock art he used in a presentation, and he snapped back with an over-the-top retort. Later, he yelled at a team member who asked for clarification on the project’s next steps.  After catching himself reacting this way, he took some time to write down how he’s been spending his time recently. Over the past week, he’s only exercised once and missed his regular volleyball game with high school friends on Wednesday night. He’s also had less than eight hours of sleep several nights in a row and can’t remember the last time he just did something just for the sake of it. Recognizing that his time is off-kilter, he reaches out to his assistant and asks him to block certain times on his calendar in the coming week so he can slip out for a lunchtime workout and meditate before a long block of coding. He also texts his wife to ensure she can watch the kids on Wednesday so he has no excuse for missing next week’s volleyball game.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 8: Get More Resilient (Healthy Mind Platter) introduces a holistic approach to enhancing cognitive health and building resilience through the concept of the Healthy Mind Platter. Designed by Dr. David Rock and Dr. Dan Siegel, this model advocates for a balanced "mental diet" comprising seven essential activities: Focus Time, Sleep, Connecting Time, Time In, Down Time, Physical Time, and Play Time. Each element plays a crucial role in optimizing mental resources, from consolidating memories and processing emotions during sleep to stimulating creativity and learning through play.  Participants will learn to assess and adjust their daily routines to incorporate a balanced mix of these activities, much like planning a nutritious diet for physical health. The goal is to use these elements both preventatively, to maintain optimal mental functioning, and reactively, to recharge the prefrontal cortex (PFC) when it becomes drained. The interconnectedness of these elements means that enhancing one area, such as increasing physical activity, can improve others, like sleep quality.  This skill emphasizes the importance of understanding and applying the Healthy Mind Platter's components to foster a state of mental well-being that supports sustained high performance, creativity, and resilience in the face of challenges. By prioritizing and strategically planning for each aspect of the Healthy Mind Platter, participants will develop routines that not only boost cognitive health but also improve overall life satisfaction and effectiveness in both personal and professional domains. Theory The concept behind the Healthy Mind Platter, designed by Dr David Rock and Dr Dan Siegel, is that you can plan to have a balanced mental diet just as you can plan to eat a range of healthy foods. We can use activities in the Healthy Mind Platter in a preventative way, to optimize our mental resources. We can also use them to recharge the PFC when it gets drained. It is worth noting that the elements can affect each other. For example, more exercise can increase the quality of sleep.  Sleep is a highly active state that helps us learn, consolidate memories, and process emotion. Physical exercise improves working memory, response speed and inhibition of impulses. It enhances learning and memory, reduces stress, anxiety and depression, and counteracts the mental decline associated with aging.  Focus time is using our executive function (PFC) to do knowledge work. In the best case scenario, it is accompanied by a state of "flow" where we don't notice time passing.  Connecting time: Based on numerous studies, the World Health Organization has included social support as one of the predictors of stress, cardiovascular disease and productivity. This is linked to the R in SCARF: Relatedness.  Play time: Play can stimulate the reward centers in the brain, release dopamine, and aid creativity and learning. Play is often social. It often includes spontaneous or unpredictable elements and experimentation. Laughter and humor are often part of play. Play is often novel, something never tried before.  Down time is different to mindfulness, and to leisure time. It is unstructured, unplanned, unfocused time when we mind-wander. Research shows that this state of “going offline” can actually be an incubation period that helps people have insights. Time in is direct experience or mindfulness. It is defined as paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.  What is the optimal amount of each Healthy Mind Platter element per week?  The Healthy Mind Platter is not a "prescription", or "one-size-fits-all”. It is up to each individual to explore what works for them.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * What is the optimal amount of each Healthy Mind Platter element per week? * How long should I spend on each element of the Healthy Mind Platter?  Application How can I create a more balanced Healthy Mind Platter?  Try tracking how much time you spend each week on each element of the Healthy Mind Platter, and use this data to plan how much time you would like to spend on each element, in order to create more balance.  Healthy Mind Platter tips for sleep:   * Studies show that “power naps” of 10 to 20 minutes are enough to experience benefits. * Simply adding an extra 20 minutes to your sleep cycle increases performance two-fold. * Sleep diary or wearable technology – some people find data motivating * A sleep plan * Exploring options to get professional help * Habit formation e.g. if-then plans around regular bedtime. * Healthy Mind Platter tips for physical time: * Explore options and stretch by trying different physical activities. * Implement ‘walking meetings’ instead of sit-down meetings. * If-then plans, for example, “If I feel my attention wane I will get up and walk around the block”. * Reminders to get up and stretch or move regularly, e.g. apps, timers * Design reappraisal statements about exercise as a powerful way to shift from an ‘away’ to a ‘toward’ state. * Create a toward state with a strong, personal vision of the benefits of physical time.   Healthy Mind Platter tips for focus time:  Seek activities that help you enter a state of “flow”. Flow is the mental state of focus with the quality of being completely enthralled, focusing on nothing but the task. You tend not to notice time passing and be focused on the process, not the outcome. Flow-inducing activities tend to have just the right amount of stretch; ideally you want your level of skill to match the level of challenge. To learn more, read Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.  Healthy Mind Platter tips for connecting time:   * Prioritize and schedule connecting time * Create if-then plans to remember to take advantage of opportunities to connect. E.g. “If someone drops by my desk for a chat I will stop what I’m doing and give them my full attention”.   Healthy Mind Platter tips for play time:   * Remind yourself of types of play you enjoyed as a child and think about how you can recreate something similar. * Try new and novel activities. * Try something “just for fun”.   Healthy Mind Platter tips for down time:   * Plan for and schedule down time. * Take mini breaks during periods of focus to aid problem solving, e.g. listen to music, read something light, take a shower.   Healthy Mind Platter tips for time in:   * Meditation and mindfulness apps * Create daily mindfulness moments by pairing them with certain activities you do on a regular basis, for example, every time I wash my hands I will focus on the sensation of the water.   What are some tips to get more resilient?  Do less: Prioritize productivity over well-being, neglecting mental health needs.  Do more: Balance your daily activities with the seven essential mental activities of the Healthy Mind Platter for optimal brain health.  Do less: Spend most of your day in solitary, focused work without breaks.  Do more: Incorporate Play-time' to add novelty, and 'Connecting Time' to engage with others, fostering emotional and social well-being.  Do less: Overlook the importance of downtime and rest in your schedule.  Do more: Ensure 'Physical Time' for moving your body and 'Down Time' for relaxation are part of your daily routine to recover from daily stresses.  Do less: Allow work and other obligations to dominate all your time.  Do more: Dedicate periods for 'Play Time' and 'Time-In' to stimulate creativity, self-awareness, and problem-solving capabilities.  Do less: Consume information passively throughout the day without breaks.  Do more: Engage in 'Focus Time' for deep work and 'Down Time' to let your mind wander, enhancing learning and integration of new ideas.  Do less: Discount the value of a good night's sleep.  Do more: Prioritize 'Sleep Time' to consolidate learning and recover from the experiences of the day.  Do less: Isolate yourself from colleagues and loved ones during stressful periods.  Do more: Seek out 'Connecting Time' with others to build relationships, empathy, and support networks.  This "do less/do more" format emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to daily activities as described by the Healthy Mind Platter, ensuring resilience through comprehensive mental health and well-being practices.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * How can I create a more balanced Healthy Mind Platter? * How can I improve my resilience? * How can I reduce my stress levels? * How can I improve my wellbeing? * How can I feel less overwhelmed? * How can I create a better work-life balance? * How can I take care of my mental health?  Scenarios Javier’s story:  Lately, Javier feels like all he’s been doing for weeks is work and has found it difficult to stay in a toward state. Since being promoted to manager, he hasn’t had time to exercise, socialize with friends and family, or even get enough sleep. The pressure of getting the new product ready to launch has been constantly on his mind, and he feels like he can’t take a break; it feels like a huge weight on his shoulders. As a result, he feels tired, overly sensitive, and irritable. Just the other day, a colleague joked with him about the stock art he used in a presentation, and he snapped back with an over-the-top retort. Later, he yelled at a team member who asked for clarification on the project’s next steps. He knows in the back of his mind that if he builds more resilience, these little requests and jabs won’t drive him over the edge, but he’s unsure how to do so and how he’ll fit it into any of his busy days.  Javier’s story, take two:  Lately, Javier feels like all he’s been doing for weeks is work and has found it difficult to stay in a toward state. Since being promoted to manager, he hasn’t had time to exercise, socialize with friends and family, or even get enough sleep. The pressure of getting the new product ready to launch has been constantly on his mind, and he feels like he can’t take a break; it feels like a huge weight on his shoulders. As a result, he feels tired, overly sensitive, and irritable. Just the other day, a colleague joked with him about the stock art he used in a presentation, and he snapped back with an over-the-top retort. Later, he yelled at a team member who asked for clarification on the project’s next steps.  After catching himself reacting this way, he took some time to write down how he’s been spending his time recently. Over the past week, he’s only exercised once and missed his regular volleyball game with high school friends on Wednesday night. He’s also had less than eight hours of sleep several nights in a row and can’t remember the last time he just did something just for the sake of it. Recognizing that his time is off-kilter, he reaches out to his assistant and asks him to block certain times on his calendar in the coming week so he can slip out for a lunchtime workout and meditate before a long block of coding. He also texts his wife to ensure she can watch the kids on Wednesday so he has no excuse for missing next week’s volleyball game. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Individuals may find it challenging to maintain focus and productivity throughout the day, especially when faced with demanding cognitive tasks.  **Solution 1:** Implement Focus Time strategies that encourage entry into a state of "flow," where attention is fully immersed in an activity, enhancing engagement and productivity. This can be achieved by matching the level of skill to the challenge at hand and seeking activities that naturally induce this optimal experience. Additionally, scheduling regular breaks can help maintain this focus and prevent cognitive fatigue.  **Problem 2:** Inadequate or disrupted sleep can significantly impact memory consolidation, emotional processing, and overall cognitive function, leading to decreased performance and resilience.  **Solution 2:** Adopt Healthy Mind Platter tips for sleep, such as integrating extending sleep cycles by 20 minutes to enhance performance. Establishing a regular bedtime routine and utilizing sleep tracking can provide insights and motivate improvements in sleep quality, thereby supporting better cognitive health and resilience.  **Problem 3:** Social isolation and a lack of meaningful connections can lead to increased stress and diminished mental resilience, undermining overall well-being.  **Solution 3**: Prioritize Connecting Time by actively scheduling quality interactions with friends, family, or colleagues. Emphasize the importance of being fully present during these interactions to strengthen relationships. Incorporating activities that foster laughter and shared experiences can also enhance feelings of connectedness and relatedness, crucial for mental health and resilience. FAQS | |
| Habit 3: Sustain good thinkingSkill 3: Deepen my growth mindset Javier’s story:  Javier, a natural at coding and software development, is struggling to get a handle on how to manage his team, like running their weekly meetings and completing performance reviews. “I just don’t think I’m good at managing. I like working on my own project, in front of a computer,” he thinks. When he sits down to plan what he’s going to say at upcoming performance reviews, he finds himself saying, “I’m never going to get this.” He can’t think of a way to make the review sound friendly and conversational, while pointing out the areas in which the employees needs improvement. To make matters worse, he’s getting pushback from his team, who keep asking why they must sit through yet another round of reviews. Javier shrugs his shoulders and complains about the changes coming down from senior leadership. Javier starts postponing reviews, but he feels it isn’t his fault because it's impossible to stay on top of his managerial duties while still being involved in the coding projects. One idea keeps running through his head: All of this is getting in the way of what he loves to do, which is code, and he’s not sure how to fix it.  Research  Javier is struggling with a common issue for new managers: He has something completely new to learn himself while also needing to lead his team through something new — which makes for a steep learning curve. Whether it’s a new technology, process, or way of operating, for Javier to succeed, he’s going to have to learn faster than he ever has before.  Part of what will help Javier learn quickly is his mindset. A mindset is the underpinning belief we have about ourselves. For Javier, one of his current mindsets is that he’s not good at managing people. This is known as a fixed mindset — that his abilities, intelligence, and other characteristics are fixed the way they are, and he can’t change them in any meaningful way.  A growth mindset, on the other hand, is the belief that we can always improve — that we’re not here to prove ourselves but improve ourselves and value the progress we make. Here, challenges and failures are viewed as launching pads for growth and opportunities. If Javier had a growth mindset, he'd view the challenge of managing people as a way to stretch his existing skills, making him better at his current job and more marketable for future positions.  ACTIVITY 1:  What activity in your current role do you feel you’re not naturally good at?  (Anonymous word cloud)  Research shows there are neural differences associated with fixed and growth mindsets. In fact, brain responses are different for those with a growth mindset — leading to greater learning, awareness, and ability to fix mistakes than for those with a fixed mindset. People with a growth mindset also pay better attention to task-relevant information, which helps them perform better.  What’s more, a growth mindset is critical to the brain’s ability to change and develop new connections — what’s called neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity, a process that occurs at least until we’re in our 80s, makes having a growth mindset possible and important at any stage of our career.  One of the best ways to practice having a growth mindset is adding the word “yet” to any thought or action. For example, you could say, “I’m not good at leading meetings.” Or, you could view it as, “I’m not good at leading meetings, yet.” This reminds us that we can always get better.  ACTIVITY 2:  Write a sentence using “yet” about the skill you named above that you’re currently struggling with as a manager. Name someone that you can use as a mentor to help you get there.  Another way to practice having a growth mindset is to experiment. Experimenting allows us to try new tactics and learn from our mistakes. You also can use the rule of three, which is to ask yourself:   * Where were you? * Where are you? * Where are you going?   For example, if you’re running a virtual meeting, you can think about what you did several months ago. Maybe you didn’t set an agenda, or you allowed side chatter to occur in the background too long. Perhaps today, you don’t do that, which allows you to see that the goal isn’t perfection but progress. Another way to keep the focus on improvement is to ask for regular feedback from colleagues and your team.  Actions to choose from:   * If I feel I’m struggling with something, I’ll add “yet” to the thing I’m struggling with to reframe the task. * If I feel my progress is stalling, I’ll use the rule of three questions. * If I’m not sure how I’m doing, I’ll ask for feedback from a team member or colleague.   Javier’s story, take two:  Javier is struggling to get a handle on how to manage his team, like running their weekly meetings and scheduling performance reviews. “I just don’t think I’m good at managing. I like working on my own project, in front of a computer,” he thinks. Then, he catches himself and changes his self-talk: “Maybe I’m just not a great manager yet.” With this mindset, he approaches several experienced managers at his company and asks how they handle performance reviews. When a team member comes over to complain about how the company is asking for more frequent reviews, instead of shrugging his shoulders, he realizes he needs to understand the meaning behind the changes so he can better explain their importance to his team. At the next team meeting, he shares what he’s learned about the review process and asks for input. Javier is far from mastering his managerial skills, but he’s on a journey that will put him in a good place for even more critical new learning ahead.  **NILES Content:** High-level overview Skill 9: Deepen My Growth Mindset focuses on the transformative concept of cultivating a growth mindset over a fixed mindset, significantly enhancing personal and professional growth. This skill is grounded in understanding the difference between seeing intelligence and talent as innate versus developable qualities, aiming to empower participants with strategies for embracing challenges, learning from feedback, and valuing progress over perfection.  Participants will explore the theory behind mindset dynamics, learning how a fixed mindset can limit performance and development by fostering a need to prove oneself, leading to avoidance of challenges and a heightened fear of failure. Conversely, adopting a growth mindset encourages the perception of abilities as improvable, transforming obstacles into opportunities for learning and self-improvement. This perspective shift not only boosts performance and resilience but also contributes to a more fulfilling and adaptive approach to work and life challenges.  The course offers practical applications and tips for transitioning from a fixed to a growth mindset, including identifying personal growth-mindset mantras, reinterpreting mistakes as essential learning steps, and framing goals to emphasize progress. Participants will be guided on how to apply if-then plans for cultivating a growth mindset in daily scenarios, effectively using metacognition to pause and redirect fixed-mindset thoughts towards growth-oriented thinking.  By the end of Skill 9, participants will have a deeper understanding of how to actively foster a growth mindset, enhancing their ability to adapt, innovate, and thrive in the face of adversity. This skill not only aims to improve productivity and well-being but also to enrich interpersonal relationships and create a more positive, growth-focused environment in both personal and professional settings. Theory Research suggests that a person’s belief in whether intelligence and talent comes naturally or is developed over time, defined as having either a “fixed” or “growth” mindset, respectively, dramatically impacts their performance at work.  When people have a FIXED MINDSET, they focus more on proving that they have a lot of ability and already know exactly what they are doing. They see their performance as a test of their competence and worth. When faced with a challenge, fixed-mindset individuals often expect to be able to somehow do the work flawlessly, no matter how complex and unfamiliar it might be. Having a fixed mindset can undermine performance, interfere with development, and increase self-doubt.  When people have a GROWTH MINDSET, they operate from the belief that skills and abilities can be improved and that developing one’s skills and abilities is the purpose of the work they do. They are more likely to see gaps in their knowledge as opportunities to learn something new. Even though people with different mindsets do not necessarily start out with different levels of skill or self-confidence, over time, having a growth mindset can lift your performance and resilience.  Each of us sometimes operate with a fixed mindset and sometimes with a growth mindset. So, your mindset can change. Growth mindset shifts along a continuum, we are not stuck with one mindset, none of us are "all fixed" or "all growth”. If we are in a threat state due to stress we may default to a fixed mindset. If someone uses growth mindset language, or helps us make a conscious choice to adopt a growth mindset, we can shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. Mindset is not a label. If you label someone as “fixed mindset”, ironically you are using a fixed mindset.  Is this course saying that I should be experiencing a growth mindset at all times in my life? Is it possible to have both fixed and growth mindsets?  We never fully have a fixed or growth mindset; we fall on a spectrum. We have a fixed mindset about certain things and growth mindset about others. However, when we are faced with challenge and adversity, it can be particularly beneficial to lean into growth-mindset practices to shift our experience. Rather than blaming others or assuming we are powerless to change a situation, we can practice growth-mindset thinking to build accountability, growth, and positive behavior change.  Are there situations where it’s beneficial to have a fixed mindset?  Research suggests that fixed mindsets — and the desire to prove yourself — can be beneficial for performance when working on tasks that are relatively easy, very familiar, and highly predictable. However, when there is any form of difficulty or challenge, adopting a growth mindset will provide the greatest advantage.  How hard is it to change my traditional ways of thinking about a missed target or challenging situation in the moment?  It takes time to slow down our automatic thinking processes, but with practice, we can consciously notice fixed-mindset patterns of thinking and start to shift them to growth mindset. One of the most powerful practices we possess as humans is the ability to slow down our thinking and reflect in a given moment about what we’re thinking — this is known as “metacognition.” We can use our metacognitive abilities to make positive changes to our thinking habits over time.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * Is it bad to have a fixed mindset? * Are there situations where it’s beneficial to have a fixed mindset? * Should I try to have a growth mindset all the time? * How do I know if I have a fixed or growth mindset? * What is the difference between fixed and growth mindset?  Application Tips to shift from fixed to growth mindset:   * Identify growth-mindset mantras that resonate for you, like "Progress not perfection", and "It's not about looking good, it's about getting better." * Think of mistakes and failures as a normal part of the learning process. * When facing a challenge, make a list of possible opportunities created by that challenge. * Seek out a mentor. * Get clarity from your manager on where and when it is appropriate to experiment, so that you feel safe to do so. * When you ask for feedback, share where you are wanting to grow and your vision of what is possible. This can help the other person give you feedback with a focus on your potential. * Frame goals in terms of progress as well as results. For example, a goal focused purely on results might be “Hit the monthly sales goals consecutively for the next three months.” To add a focus on results as well you might add something like “Increase the percentage of return business by 15%”. * Compare your performance now to your performance in the past as a way to value the progress you are making.   Tips to deepen my growth mindset  Do less: Focus on what you are good at  Do more: Role model being an active learner  Do less: Maintain the status quo  Do more: Experiment publicly  Do less: Express competence and high ability  Do more: Share stories of mistakes and learning  Do less: See challenges as threats to your competence.  Do more: Embrace challenges as opportunities to grow and learn.  Do less: Hide mistakes and view them as failures.  Do more: Acknowledge mistakes openly and learn from them to foster resilience.  Do less: Stick strictly to what you know to ensure success.  Do more: Venture into new territories and skill sets, understanding that effort leads to mastery over time.  Do less: Give up when progress isn’t immediate.  Do more: Persevere through difficulties, seeing effort as a path to substantial improvement.  Do less: Feel threatened by the success of others.  Do more: Find lessons and inspiration in the success of others to motivate your own growth.  Do less: Believe that talents and abilities are fixed traits.  Do more: Cultivate a belief in the potential to develop new skills and capacities through dedication and hard work.  Do less: Ignore feedback or take it personally.  Do more: Utilize feedback as a valuable source of guidance for learning and evolving.  This approach emphasizes shifting perspective and actions towards behaviors that encourage personal development, risk-taking, and continuous learning, aligning with the core principles of fostering a growth mindset in oneself.  What are some examples of if-then plans for building my own growth mindset?   * When I get stuck and frustrated while working in the new data system, then I will focus on the progress I’m making. * If someone gives me feedback on how to improve, then I’ll listen without defending myself and ask questions to seek clarity. * If I don’t understand my manager’s feedback, then I’ll ask for an example or more information.   APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * How do I shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset? * My manager does not have a growth mindset about me, what can I do? * How do I reduce my levels of stress? * How can I be more innovative? * My organizational culture is fixed mindset, how do I adopt a growth mindset in this environment? * How do I deal with difficult feedback about where I need to improve?  Scenarios Javier’s story:  Javier, a natural at coding and software development, is struggling to get a handle on how to manage his team, like running their weekly meetings and completing performance reviews. “I just don’t think I’m good at managing. I like working on my own project, in front of a computer,” he thinks. When he sits down to plan what he’s going to say at upcoming performance reviews, he finds himself saying, “I’m never going to get this.” He can’t think of a way to make the review sound friendly and conversational, while pointing out the areas in which the employees needs improvement. To make matters worse, he’s getting pushback from his team, who keep asking why they must sit through yet another round of reviews. Javier shrugs his shoulders and complains about the changes coming down from senior leadership. Javier starts postponing reviews, but he feels it isn’t his fault because it's impossible to stay on top of his managerial duties while still being involved in the coding projects. One idea keeps running through his head: All of this is getting in the way of what he loves to do, which is code, and he’s not sure how to fix it.  Javier’s story, take two:  Javier is struggling to get a handle on how to manage his team, like running their weekly meetings and scheduling performance reviews. “I just don’t think I’m good at managing. I like working on my own project, in front of a computer,” he thinks. Then, he catches himself and changes his self-talk: “Maybe I’m just not a great manager yet.” With this mindset, he approaches several experienced managers at his company and asks how they handle performance reviews. When a team member comes over to complain about how the company is asking for more frequent reviews, instead of shrugging his shoulders, he realizes he needs to understand the meaning behind the changes so he can better explain their importance to his team. At the next team meeting, he shares what he’s learned about the review process and asks for input. Javier is far from mastering his managerial skills, but he’s on a journey that will put him in a good place for even more critical new learning ahead. Blog posts Reducing stress with growth mindset  While stress-fighting techniques like exercise and meditation can reduce baseline anxiety and calm excitatory neurons, they don’t address the cognitive causes of stress within the brain. But if we take stress as an affliction spurred on by misallocated attention, growth mindset may hold a solution.  Growth mindset assumes that skills are simmering wells of possibility and potential, rather than fixed traits. In personal and professional settings, people can develop their faculties, acquire new abilities, and strengthen their existing capacities. Seeing the world through the lens of growth enables you to steer your thoughts away from the negative focus induced by stress and back toward the positive.  When you cultivate a growth mindset, you don’t worry so much about problems. Instead of wondering how you’ll get through a crisis, you ask yourself a far more constructive question: “What can I learn from this situation to better develop my skills?”  Since no one tells you that building a growth mindset can be so uncomfortable, here are four steps to help you stay on course.  1. Get familiar with the feeling of fear  Growth mindset is riddled with uncertainty, one of the key social threats found in the SCARF® Model, a way of organizing unique domains of threat and reward. When we feel highly uncertain, our attention narrows and our cognitive function suffers.  When developing a growth mindset in a particular area, it’s important to identify moments of fearfulness to recognize which thoughts may be holding us back. Creating this self-awareness lets people determine whether they really are in tough situation or just new to something.  2. Know you will get frustrated, and that’s okay  Developing a growth mindset doesn’t mean that all learning will come easy, and that you will feel great all the time.  The key to building growth mindset is to recognize that setbacks are inevitable, and also temporary. Learning requires a willingness to figure out how to make progress and move forward despite initial frustrations.  Sometimes the best remedy to a challenge is rethinking your approach. Taking a break to let past insights marinate can help re-energize you to tackle the problem again.  3. Monitor your progress in order to make adjustments  Embracing your ability to grow, develop, and stretch will take practice, and a focus on measuring progress over time. It helps to look at what you’ve learned and where you have room to get even better.  As we’ve written before, getting to a state of regular, specific feedback one of the best ways to develop a growth mindset. That means being willing to confront weak spots, concocting ways to adjust, and testing those solutions as soon as possible.  4. Share what you’ve learned and what it took to get there  One of the most powerful ways to embrace the discomfort of developing a growth mindset is to share your journey and learning with others. We learn best when we can turn ideas into concrete writing or discussion, and create new energy around it. Sharing your wins and failures may create greater intrinsic reward, which research has shown is extremely motivating. And who knows, you may gain a Growth Mindset Partner as you share your story.  How to handle feedback with a growth mindset  Imagine you’ve just given a major presentation, and your manager asks if she can share her thoughts on how it went.  Equipped with a growth mindset, you’d approach the conversation focused on how you can grow: improving at public speaking, articulating your thoughts more clearly, structuring your presentation to capture and hold people’s attention. You see every piece of feedback your manager gives you as an opportunity to move toward your goals. You may not agree with everything she says, but your mind is open and receptive to her input.  The beauty of growth mindset is that it’s self-reinforcing. As you gain more confidence in your own ability to learn and grow, each feedback conversation becomes easier than the last. You become more capable of discussing high-stakes issues with honesty and transparency because neither side feels threatened.  So what’s the best way to push ourselves out of our comfort zone at work?  Adopt a growth mindset  There’s no way around it: Growth requires embracing discomfort. To quote a mawkish but accurate motivational poster: “Comfort zones are where dreams go to die.”  The first step is to adopt a growth mindset, the hallmark of which is the willingness to try new things, fail, and learn from failure — all of which requires accepting the presence of fear. If you avoid everything that scares you, you’ll never learn new things. Whether you want to learn to dance, get better at public speaking, or approach someone at a party, you need to put yourself in situations that make you uncomfortable. It’s the same principle behind strength training: stressing your body beyond what it can comfortably handle. Over time, your muscles get bigger, and you get stronger. Discomfort stimulates growth — literally.  Reframe the meaning of discomfort  As Epictetus observed 2,000 years ago, it’s not situations that make us anxious but our interpretation of them. And the default interpretation isn’t always the right one. Contrary to what your brain tells you, discomfort doesn’t equal death. In the modern world, discomfort often means you’re making progress — that you’ve pushed yourself out of your comfort zone and taken on a difficult challenge.  The key is to change the meaning of discomfort — a process known as reappraisal. “No pain no gain.” “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” These mottos all have the same message: Learn to see discomfort as an important sign of progress and growth.  In one study, for example, improv students who were told that their “goal is to feel awkward and uncomfortable during the exercise” learned more and made more progress than students who were advised that their goal was to “develop new skills.” “When we feel out of our comfort zone, we interpret that as a sign to proceed carefully, or not at all,” explains Kaitlin Woolley, the Cornell psychologist who led the study. “Yet, ultimately to succeed in business, we need to take risks. Seeking discomfort can help ensure our success.”  Start small  Even with the right mindset, stepping outside your comfort zone is, by definition, unnerving. When you think about speaking in front of a thousand people, your stomach might fill with butterflies. But as stressful as it feels, it probably won’t be as unpleasant as you imagine.  Remember, even a small step is a step forward. The goal isn’t to terrify yourself — it’s to find an optimal state of arousal in the face of mild threat. And the good news is it gets easier. Over time, you’ll get used to the feeling of “productive discomfort.” You may even come to embrace and enjoy it as a sign you’re getting better.  What got you here may not get you there.  You’ve been proud of your innate ability with data. Or research. Or selling. You’ve found the thing you’re effortlessly good at, and you love doing it. You’re known for it.  Being the go-to is the foundation of your well-earned status. But there is a cost to regarding yourself through that fixed mindset. You cannot afford to rest on your laurels. Not now, when you have to give your all to meet today’s unprecedented challenges. With a fixed mindset, your all may not be enough to ensure you prevail, because what got you here may not get you there.  Instead, what you need is a mindset tilted towards growth.  Don’t prove yourself—improve yourself  You might recognize these two sides of the fixed mindset coin:  “I’m great. I got that. Let me show you.”  A fixed mindset says that you know pretty much all you need to know, maybe all there is to know. You answer any challenge to your expertise with evidence of your wins, and you have a lot of wins.  “I’m just no good at that. I’ve never been any good at that.”  And you might change the subject to discuss your success. It’s not a big deal to acknowledge an inadequacy because you can point to all your successes. It might be a little humblebrag.  The cost: Either way, you lose opportunities to grow your capabilities and grow your self-image. Every time you seek to prove your talent, rather than discover the reason you felt challenged, your fixed mindset will cost you the chance to grow. Every time you refuse a challenge because it requires skills you weren’t born with, because you’re pretty sure you won’t be the best, you close the door on growth.  When someone doubts or disagrees with you, you may be eager to point to past success in similar situations as proof that you’re right. What if, instead of defending your position, you sought to understand their doubt or disagreement? After all, you’re trying to solve a problem. You’re not competing for Most Knowledgeable.  Seek to get better, rather than look good  If someone’s doubting or objecting to your way or your view, have them tell you the source of their doubt or objection. Listen to understand, without looking for chances to defend yourself. Adopt a growth mindset—that is, focus more on getting better than on looking good—and try to see it from their perspective.  As a result, your own perspective may broaden or change. You may even improve in that area you thought you’d already mastered. A growth mindset is just that—your mind is set to grow.  Similarly, a fixed mindset leads you to believe that if you’re not good at it now, you won’t ever be any good, and that if you’re already good, you’ll always be good, so there’s no need to try. You may think it lets you off the hook. But we all need to stretch and grow to thrive through challenges. Why accept incompetence?  Instead of thinking you’re not good, what if you thought you weren’t good yet? Rather than thinking of yourself as a failure, what if you thought of a stumble getting you one step further along the path of learning? A growth mindset—a mind set to grow—just may lead to new capabilities, and real change.  You’re probably known for many things, including being very hard-working. Let the definition of hard-working include working hard to grow. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Individuals with a fixed mindset may avoid challenging tasks to protect their self-image, fearing that failure will reflect poorly on their inherent abilities.  **Solution 1:** Encourage the adoption of growth-mindset mantras such as "Progress, not perfection" to reframe challenges as opportunities for learning rather than tests of innate ability. This shift helps individuals to embrace challenges with enthusiasm, focusing on the development of skills and knowledge rather than the outcome.  **Problem 2:** Receiving critical feedback can be particularly hard for those with a fixed mindset, as it may be interpreted as an indictment of their core competencies or intelligence.  **Solution 2:** Foster an environment that emphasizes feedback as a tool for growth and improvement. Encourage individuals to seek clarity on feedback and view it as a roadmap for development, asking questions to deepen understanding and setting goals for progress based on the insights received.  **Problem 3:** During stressful situations, individuals may default to a fixed mindset, doubting their ability to overcome new challenges and grow from the experience.  **Solution 3:** Utilize metacognitive strategies to identify and counteract fixed-mindset thoughts in real time. When faced with adversity, practice asking growth-oriented questions such as, "What can I learn from this situation?" or "How can this challenge help me grow?" This approach helps shift the focus from self-doubt to personal development, leveraging adversity as a catalyst for resilience and growth. FAQS | |
| (MODULE 2 - Mobilize others)Habit 1: Connect efficientlySkill 1: Build strong connections (  **(Maria- govt finance-** finance team manager. Government: policy / procedural challenges.**)**  Recent policy changes to the way finances are reported have placed a huge strain on Maria’s *finance team*, and because of all her extra duties, she’s had a difficult time feeling connected with her team. She’s juggling many additional projects and attending more meetings than ever before, so she doesn’t have time for the small talk or casual interactions she once had with co-workers. When Remy arrives for his weekly one-on-one meeting, Maria gets straight to the point. “We’ve had a couple of complaints from other departments that you’ve been impatient and rude when asked to help with financial reports. What’s going on?” Remy, who looks like he’s fighting back tears, says, “I’m sorry. I’ve had some personal issues lately that have made it difficult to do my job.” Maria is momentarily distracted when her phone buzzes, but after noticing it’s just a reminder to pick up groceries after work, she directs her attention back to Sally. Maria says, “I’m sorry to hear that. However, we have to keep our personal lives out of work, no matter what’s going on.” Then, sensing she needs to say something to make Remy feel better, she says, “Is there anything I can do to help?” Remy replies, “No, I’ll be okay.” But the next day, Maria gets a report that Remy broke down in tears during a meeting, having to leave the meeting early.  **ACTIVITY 1:**  *How does it feel when someone’s not really listening to what you’re saying?*  *(word cloud)*  *Now, how does it feel when someone’s really listening to what you’re saying?*  *(word cloud)*  **Research**  As Maria will soon discover, active listening is a stepping stone toward showing empathy. Empathy is the ability to appreciate someone else’s perspective even though you’re not experiencing it. Developing our ability to show empathy begins by tuning into the moment. As we perceive and make sense of the world around us, we often fluctuate between engaging one of two sets of brain networks: the narrative experience and the direct experience. When the narrative experience network is engaged, it helps you think about yourself, your past, your future, and those around you. But when you engage the network that allows you to take in the direct experience, you focus on the information from your senses in real time, like what the person in front of you is saying.  To tune into others, we need to intentionally activate this direct experience network, and one way to do this is by practicing mindful moments, where we focus our attention on clearing our mind and tuning out distractions. While it requires minimal training, it does require practice. As we get better at tuning in, our ability to understand another person and share in their experiences also improves. In fact, as we improve our ability to listen to and accurately understand another person, our brain waves can synchronize with theirs while communicating. This leads to better overall communication, understanding, and relationships.  When you actively listen, you also become better at perspective taking. Rather than assuming you understand someone’s perspective (research shows you’re probably wrong), ask them. And when they’re facing a challenge, as Sally was, offer them options to choose from rather than making vague offers (e.g., “Can I do anything to help?”) or assuming you know what they need (e.g., “Take the rest of the day off”).  **ACTIVITY 2:**  *Name three ways you can show a direct report you’re truly listening to them instead of just listening to respond.*  **Actions to choose from:**   * If I’m preparing for a meeting with a direct report, then I’ll take a mindful moment right before the meeting to clear my mind of distracting thoughts so I can actively listen. * If I don’t have time to prepare for a conversation, then I’ll at least take a few deep breaths or perform a quick breathing exercise, such as [cyclic sighing](https://neuroleadership.com/your-brain-at-work/latest-from-the-lab-sighing-reduces-stress). * If a direct report needs help, I’ll offer 2-3 options for them to choose from rather than making vague offers or assuming I know what they need.   **[Maria’s story take two]**  Recent policy changes to the way finances are reported have placed a huge strain on Maria’s *finance team*, and because of all her extra duties, she’s had a difficult time feeling connected with her team. She’s juggling many additional projects and sitting in more meetings than ever before, so she doesn’t have time for the small talk or casual interactions she once had with co-workers. Maria receives a reminder on her computer 15 minutes before Remy’s weekly one-on-one meeting. She decides to prepare for the meeting by putting her phone away in a drawer and taking a mindful moment. She breathes deeply and writes down all of the items on her mind and prioritizes them as a way to clear her head of everything that will prevent her from listening actively to Remy.  When Remy arrives for the meeting, Maria notices she seems out of sorts and asks how she’s doing. “Not very well,” Remy replies. “I’ve had some personal issues lately that have made it difficult to do my job.” Maria says, “Oh, no, I’m so sorry to hear that. Do you want to talk about it?” Remy explains that her husband is very ill in the hospital. She’s been sleeping (or rather, not sleeping) in his hospital room most nights, and in addition to worrying about her husband’s health, she’s been anxious about the hospital bill. So when she’s at work and feels stretched in too many directions, she finds it difficult to not lose patience. Maria listens until Remy is done, nodding and asking questions from time to time. Then, she offers three options: Would Remy like to take the paid family medical leave the company offers? Or, if she’d prefer the distraction of working, they could look at her workload and see if some tasks could be reassigned? Or as a third option, perhaps it would help to take advantage of the mental health counseling the company’s insurance provides. Remy leaves the conversation feeling truly heard and cared about by her manager.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 1: Build Strong Connections, introduces the foundational skill of fostering deep, meaningful connections by harnessing the power of mindfulness and neural synchronization. This skill emphasizes the importance of being fully present in interactions, enabling individuals to tune into the experiences and perspectives of others with care and attention. By understanding and practicing mindfulness, participants learn to shift their focus away from internal distractions and narratives, towards the rich, real-time sensory input of the present moment.  Through this skill, participants will explore the neural underpinnings of connection, including how our brains can synchronize during effective communication, leading to enhanced understanding and stronger relationships. The course offers practical strategies for increasing neural synchrony, such as actively sharing emotions, being intentional about connecting, and employing mindfulness techniques to stay engaged in the conversation.  Participants will be equipped with tools to practice mindfulness in everyday activities, transforming routine interactions into opportunities for connection. By applying these practices, individuals will not only improve their ability to connect with others but also enhance their overall well-being, decision-making, and goal achievement. This skill sets the stage for building resilient, collaborative relationships that are vital for personal growth and professional success. Theory Connect with care  When connecting with others, it’s important to tune into the moment so our attention is focused on the present interaction. But our minds tend to wander into the past or future, ruminating over a previous experience, thinking about what the rest of the day entails, or worrying about life’s many stressors — all things that prevent us from connecting with care. Fortunately, even briefly engaging in meditation can improve our focus by enhancing our attention, memory, mood, and emotional regulation.  Once we’ve tuned into the moment, we can concentrate on learning about the experiences and perspectives of others. During a conversation, our neural activity will synchronize with the other person’s if we share a similar emotional reaction, understand a situation, or align our perspectives. This synchronization occurs when neural activity in the speaker’s motor cortex occurs at the same time as neural activity in the listener’s sensory system, so that the brain of the listener is optimally prepared to interpret the speaker’s words. When our neural activity  is synchronized, we’re better able to communicate efficiently, and understanding each other becomes easier. This leads to a stronger, more fulfilling relationship.  We may not always agree with the perspectives of others. That’s okay, especially if we focus on understanding and validating them. In fact, showing that you truly understand someone is rewarding to them even if you don’t agree. We can connect with care when we tune into the moment, listen to learn, and center on understanding.  We can increase our neural synchrony by:   * Communicating — by seeing and hearing the other person. * Sharing our emotions with one another, especially if we’re feeling positive emotions. * Being intentional about our desire to connect.   Two networks  Narrative experience is our mind’s default way of processing reality. It is focused on the past, the future, ourselves, and our relationships to others. It is involved in planning, daydreaming, and ruminating.  Direct experience is when you’re not thinking about the past, future, or yourself. Rather, you’re experiencing information coming into your senses in real time. Research has found a correlation between regular practice of direct experience and greater emotion regulation (Siegel, 2007).  Practice makes better  A 2007 study found that people who regularly practice noticing when they are in narrative versus direct experience (like regular meditators) were more likely to know which path they were on at any given moment and were able to switch between them more easily (Farb, 2007.)  **THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS**   * What are the benefits of mindfulness?  Application **How do I get better at mindfulness?**  You don't have to sit still, but you do need to practice  Leading mindfulness researcher John Teasdale once explained, “Mindfulness is a habit; it’s something the more one does, the more likely one is to be in that mode with less and less effort ... It’s a skill that can be learned. It’s accessing something we already have. Mindfulness isn’t difficult. What’s difficult is to remember to be mindful.” I love this last statement. Mindfulness isn’t difficult: The hard part is remembering to do it.  The key is to practice focusing your attention on a direct sensation, and do so often. It helps to use a rich stream of data. For example, you can hold your attention to the feeling of your foot on the floor easier than the feeling of your little toe on the floor: There’s more data to tap into. You can practice mindfulness while you’re eating, walking, talking, or doing just about anything.  Building mindfulness doesn't mean you have to sit still and observe your breath. You can find a way that suits your lifestyle. Years ago, my wife and I built a 10-second ritual into the evening meal with our kids, which involves stopping and noticing three small breaths together before we eat. An added bonus: It makes a great dinner taste even better.  Whatever ritual you develop, practice it. The more mindful you become, the better decisions you’ll make, and the more you’ll achieve your goals.  **How do I build stronger connections during conversations?**  Do less of this:   * Allow disruptive distractions. * Let your thoughts wander. * Be distracted by your own narrative. * Imagine their perspective. * Correct their thinking if they’re wrong. * Question the validity of what they’re saying. * React emotionally during charged conversations. * Label the emotions you see in others. * Make assumptions based on the way you think. * Presume you understand their experience. * Focus the conversation on yourself. * Dismiss how the other person feels. * Provide overly prescriptive or vague help. * Get stuck on the details and problems.   Do more of this:   * Manage and minimize distractions. * Bring your focus back to the conversation. * Stay in the flow of their story. * Listen to their perspective. * Validate their experience and emotions. * Ask clarifying questions if you need more details. * Support and acknowledge their experience. * Suspend judgment. * Pause to assess the presence of emotions. * Help others label their own emotions. * Ask questions to uncover their experience. * Focus the conversation on the other person. * Lean in on how to help. * Focus on lessening the burden with choice. * Offer differentiated choices. * Going forward, check in to see how their story has evolved. * Support their way forward.   **Question: How can I build stronger connections when my client or stakeholder is frustrated?**    At the beginning of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to: Jump into the conversation, instead: Take note of how the connection starts. * If you are tempted to: See the client as “them” versus “us.”, instead: Find a commonality with the client. * If you are tempted to:Focus on the next step in the process, instead: Be in the present moment.   In the middle of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to:Suggest your own perspective, instead: Listen to learn their perspective. * If you are tempted to: Challenge the validity of their experience, instead: Use “Yes AND” to validate their experience. * If you are tempted to: Assume they can handle complex decisions, instead: Recognize how emotion affects decision-making.   At the end of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to: Prescribe the only way forward, instead: Provide any choices you can. * If you are tempted to: Assume it’s over after the conversation, instead: Schedule a follow-up to check satisfaction. * If you are tempted to: Move quickly to the next task or interaction, instead: Record outcomes with detailed notes for others.   **Question: How can I build stronger connections when my colleague is experiencing a difficult situation?**  At the beginning of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to: Jump into conversation, instead, take note of how the connection starts. * If you are tempted to:Ignore any emotion and hope it passes, instead pause to explore emotional state. * If you are tempted to: Label the emotion for them, instead: Help them label their emotion.   In the middle of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to: Multitask while you listen, instead be in the present and show you care. * If you are tempted to: Assume your perspective is accurate, instead listen to their story and ask questions. * If you are tempted to: Challenge the validity of their experience, instead use “Yes AND” to validate their experience.   At the end of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to: Assume they can handle complex decisions, instead recognize how emotion affects * decision-making. * Offer too many choices or just one, instead provide autonomy and appropriate choice. * Assume it’s over after the conversation, instead plan to keep the connection going.   **Question: How can I build stronger connections when my direct report is overwhelmed?**  At the beginning of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to put off requests for immediate connection, instead always take time for urgent check-ins. * If you are tempted to finish what you’re working on, instead pause to stay attentive. * If you are tempted to assume you know what’s on their mind, instead remove your expectations.   In the middle of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to ignore emotional signals, instead pause to explore hidden signals. * If you are tempted to ask for a list of things they’re working on, instead give them space to talk about what’s on their mind. * If you are tempted to tell them it’s all manageable, instead validate and clarify what you understand.   At the end of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to ask them how they’ll manage it all, instead help with their decision-making if needed. * If you are tempted to take something off their plate, instead ask if you can help them reprioritize tasks. * If you are tempted to send them on their way, instead check in after a week or so.   **Question: How do I check in or reconnect with a colleague, client or stakeholder after a difficult situation?**  At the beginning of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to schedule a check-in without context, instead frame the check-in as a positive follow-up. * If you are tempted to assume things haven’t changed, instead be present; ask about their current feelings. * If you are tempted to tell them how things have progressed, instead check current reality and where the energy is.   In the middle of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to ignore lack of emotion, instead ask questions about how their story has evolved. * If you are tempted to hypothesize what has happened, instead listen to learn new details. * If you are tempted to focus on resolving things quickly, instead acknowledge challenges and positive outcomes.   At the end of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to get stuck on the detail and problems, instead look towards solutions of anything still unaddressed. * If you are tempted to tell them to reconnect if needed, instead decide if another check-in is appropriate.   **What are some tips to build strong connections and tune in?**  Do less: Multitask during conversations, splitting your attention.  Do more: Dedicate your full attention to the conversation, embracing mindfulness to ensure you’re fully present.  Do less: Plan your response while the other person is speaking.  Do more: Listen actively, focusing on understanding their perspective before thinking about how to respond.  Do less: Let your mind wander to other concerns and tasks during interactions.  Do more: Utilize techniques like deep breathing or grounding to bring your focus back to the present conversation.  Do less: Overlook non-verbal cues because you’re distracted by your thoughts.  Do more: Pay attention to body language and tone of voice to fully appreciate the communication context.  Do less: Allow external environments to disrupt your engagement in conversations.  Do more: Choose or create settings that minimize distractions, facilitating deeper, more focused interactions.  Do less: Conduct important conversations in a hurry or while emotionally agitated.  Do more: Ensure you’re in a calm, centered state before engaging, utilizing mindfulness to stabilize your emotions.  Do less: Stick strictly to business or agenda without acknowledging the human element.  Do more: Begin conversations by tuning in to the individual’s current state, showing empathy and genuine interest.  This "do less/do more" format emphasizes the importance of mindfulness and being present in interactions, fostering stronger, meaningful connections by truly tuning in to others.  **APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS**   * How do I get better at mindfulness? * How do I improve my listening skills? * How do I improve my conversation skills? * How do I connect better with my direct reports? * What are some tips to lead with empathy? * How do I navigate conversations when other people get emotional? * How can I better engage my direct reports?  ScenariosBlog posts **Make it OK to not be OK**  It’s important for managers to model sensitivity and compassion toward loss. When the news serves up a collective tragedy, for example, make the time to bring it up in meetings. Consider sharing your own feelings, and allow time for others to speak freely about theirs. This sets the tone and communicates a routinely caring environment. If you can, extend options for rest or extra breaks for anyone feeling affected by larger world events.  Keep in mind that some losses, when shared, won’t seem like a big deal to you. Maybe your colleague just dropped off her only daughter at college. Telling her to cheer up because at least there’s less laundry to do might be well-intentioned and seem light-hearted, but it could minimize the profound loss your colleague is feeling. Simply listening can help ease the isolation of someone who’s suffering.  **Prioritize compassion**  For some leaders, addressing grief at work can feel foreign and uncomfortable. But just like other management skills, offering empathy and extending compassion in the workplace can be learned. It can help to spend time reflecting on your own journey with grief and loss. By tuning into yourself, you’re better equipped to tune into others.  While even the most compassionate environment can’t take away loss, employers can do plenty to remove the fear that work and income will soon become an additional problem for grieving workers. This can go a long way toward helping people attend to the impact of their loss and ultimately heal.  **Why Sensitivity Can Be a Superpower at Work**  You see an email from your co-worker pop up asking about a project you’re working on together. While typing your response, you hear a notification go off on your phone, alerting you to a message from your manager about a client. As you make a mental note to get to that later, your phone starts ringing, and you see it’s a call from your direct report, who just started last week and is trying to get up to speed. The chimes and pings are starting to make you feel a little overwhelmed, so you put your devices on do-not-disturb mode. In the blissful silence that follows, you’re able to give your colleague the information they need, provide your manager details regarding the client, and offer thoughtful guidance to your new employee.  This is a common scenario in the modern workplace, where we’re often asked to juggle many tasks at once. The problem isn’t necessarily the long task list but the endless stimulation we get from our environment. Some people may not be bothered by it, while others become so troubled they can’t focus at all.  What determines which camp you fall into is sensitivity: an innate trait that exists in all of us to varying degrees, not unlike extraversion and introversion. Using questions like, “Are you easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input?” and “Do other people’s moods affect you?” researchers estimate that approximately 30% of the population fall on the high end of sensitivity, 40% land somewhere in the middle, and the other 30% are considered low in sensitivity.  With all that’s gone on in the world over the past few years, now is the moment for sensitivity to shine. Burnout has gone mainstream, and employee retention is a pressing priority for many companies. Even so, managers underestimate how much employees are struggling with their well-being: According to a recent Deloitte survey, one out of three employees and executives reported struggling with fatigue and mental health. This is a gap that highly sensitive leaders can fill by tapping into their natural empathy and heightened awareness of others’ emotions.  **Debunking stereotypes of sensitivity**  When you think of a sensitive person, you may imagine someone whose feelings are easily hurt. But that’s not really what this trait is all about. Sensitivity describes how responsive you are to external stimuli, such as visuals and sounds, and how deeply you think about things. People who are sensitive or highly sensitive are more prone to become overstimulated when there’s a lot going on in their environment. In unfamiliar situations, they like to pause and take time to process their thoughts. They’re also naturally more empathetic because they react strongly to others’ moods and feelings. That’s why people who have higher sensitivity show greater brain activation in regions involved in attention, action planning, and empathy.  At first glance, these characteristics seem to be the opposite of desirable leadership qualities. After all, capable leaders often have to keep a clear head no matter how chaotic their surroundings are, make decisions quickly, and be willing to jump into novel situations to capitalize on emerging opportunities. But sensitive people do have strengths that make them effective leaders, especially in today’s working world. A Catalyst survey shows that empathy, one of the key characteristics of sensitive individuals, in leadership drives innovation and engagement in the workplace: Sixty-one percent of people with highly empathetic senior leaders reported often/always being innovative at work, while 76% reported often/always being engaged.  What’s more, sensitive individuals possess other traits that are crucial for success as a manager, according to research. More sensitive people tend to pick up on subtle social and emotional cues that are easily missed by others, such as changes in facial expressions and behaviors. Since they prefer to think things through and use lessons they learned in the past to inform future planning, they can keep their eye on the big picture, avoid past mistakes, and build on previous successes.  **Here are three ways managers and leaders can leverage their sensitivity to boost employee well-being.**  **Recognize signs of burnout and take action**  In the same Deloitte survey, professionals said one of the major hurdles to prioritizing their well-being is finding time to unplug from work, whether it’s taking a multiday vacation or short breaks throughout a workday. Unsurprisingly, research has shown that getting away from work for a few days lowers perceived job stress and burnout. A more recent study found even taking short breaks called microbreaks, which last only 10 minutes, can boost energy and performance.  As a sensitive leader, you can encourage employees showing signs of exhaustion and burnout — such as sending curt responses to co-workers’ messages when they used to be friendly and warm — to take a coffee break or consider using their vacation days. Being proactive in approaching your employees not only shows that you care about them, but it also opens an opportunity to discuss and remove barriers that may be preventing your employees from taking a well-deserved break.  **Promote inclusion**  You’ve likely noticed that some people dominate at meetings, while others prefer to take notes and listen. An inclusive workplace strives to incorporate as many different points of view as possible, and you can help facilitate that as a sensitive leader. If someone routinely shares great ideas during your one-on-one meetings but doesn’t say much in larger meetings, you can bring that up to them and discuss the best ways to help them participate. Another way to make sure everyone feels valued and included is to spotlight the contribution of every team member when you celebrate successes. Besides building employees’ confidence, inclusive leadership has also been found to reduce their emotional exhaustion.  **Tailor feedback to each employee**  Sensitive leaders can typically sense someone’s true personality since they pay close attention to others’ actions and responses in different situations. Use that knowledge to your advantage when providing feedback to different employees. If you perceive someone to be more critical of their own work and shy away from speaking up at meetings, you’ll want to make sure your feedback highlights their strengths and deliver your comments in private rather than a group setting. Tailoring your feedback delivery style according to what works best for each employee shows that you value them and are invested in their professional development.  Sensitivity is an asset, not a liability, as some people may believe. By tapping into your heightened awareness of others’ emotional states, you can learn what your employees need and guide them effectively. Not only will you build a more creative and engaged team, but you’ll also help your employees feel more fulfilled and take ownership of their professional growth.  **Lead with empathy**  Transparency is crucial for building trust and fostering a productive work environment, but there is such a thing as too much information, and transparency doesn’t mean managers should share everything they’re able to share at all times. It’s about providing the right amount of information at the right time.  Say a company is experiencing a revenue dip but has a stable outlook and is in no danger of going under. Sharing that information could be constructive, providing clarity and security for employees. If the revenue dip continues for months, employees may need to be alerted that layoffs are likely, but managers must balance the threat caused by uncertainty against the threat of bad news.  Striking a balance between sharing and oversharing is more art than science, but within the constraints of what you can and can’t share, the guiding principle behind your communication should be empathy. Put yourself in employees’ shoes. What information would you want or need if you were in their position? What concerns or questions might you have? Ultimately, being transparent means being a steward of information, using one’s best judgment to decide what to share and when, and always keeping the welfare of the employees in mind.  **Lead change with empathy**  Instead of simply announcing a new vision and waiting for employees to fall in line, managers need to recognize that change is uncomfortable. Accept that employees may be exhausted by organizational initiatives, and acknowledge the stress and uncertainty that go along with being asked to adopt new behaviors.  **How to understand the perspectives of others**  We’ve all heard the saying, “You can’t truly understand someone until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.” The expression is meant to encourage empathy, but how practical is it, particularly if the other person’s “shoes” are so radically different from your own that you can’t even squeeze your feet into them?  And yet, that’s exactly what perspective-taking seeks to do: to perceive a concept or situation from another’s point of view. In recent years, leaders have doubled down on this idea to build skills such as empathy, enhance diversity, and retain employees.  That’s the irony with perspective-taking. It increases people’s certainty that they understand other points of view, but most of the time, they really don’t, according to Nicholas Epley of the University of Chicago. In 25 studies where subjects were asked to put themselves into another person’s shoes before answering questions about them, perspective-taking sometimes increased their confidence about their answers but never their accuracy.  That disconnect between confidence and accuracy is called the Dunning-Kruger effect, in which people who lack knowledge or skills in certain areas overestimate their abilities. In the realm of perspective-taking, this can be particularly harmful: When you misinterpret a person’s true perspective while being supremely confident you know what they want, it shuts down lines of communication and leaves employees feeling ignored and misunderstood.  To help avoid this situation, let’s dig into the most common mistakes of perspective-taking:  **Mistake No. 1: Trying to see things from someone else’s point of view but still seeing through our own eyes.**  When you too quickly step into another person’s shoes, you often think about what you would do in their situation because you’re taking your blind spots and biases with you.  Every brain has biases, or shortcuts evolutionarily designed to keep us safe. Biases aren’t categorically bad. For example, expedience bias — the preference to act quickly rather than taking the time to fully understand all nuances of a situation — is sometimes necessary for leaders to efficiently accomplish goals. But deliberately slowing down to see others’ perspectives can help leaders make better decisions. Similarly, experience bias, which leads us to believe that the way we see things is the objective reality, can lead us to view other points of view through a distorted, judgmental lens: How can they believe that nonsense?  **Solution**: Practice perspective-getting. Instead of perspective-taking, which is the passive process of using your existing knowledge about another person to put yourself in their shoes, try to actually get perspectives. Research indicates that getting another person’s perspective through active listening and asking questions increases accuracy, whereas perspective-taking does not. “Increasing interpersonal accuracy seems to require gaining new information rather than utilizing existing knowledge about another person,” the researchers conclude.  **Mistake No. 2: Not realizing that power dynamics get in the way.**  Power affects perspective-taking in two ways: The more powerful person doesn’t consider the less powerful person’s perspective, and the less powerful one doesn’t share their true perspective. In the exchange above, the employee eventually gave up trying to explain what the manager might be missing.  Research has shown that having, or even feeling like you have, relative power in a situation produces increased activity in the brain’s behavioral approach system (BAS). This reward-seeking system leads to greater goal orientation, optimism, and focus on vision. Those are all important qualities for leaders, but they can also cause perspective blindness. When perspective blindness leads powerful people to pursue reward and status at the expense of others, it creates a toxic culture that discourages honesty.  **Solution**: Ask in a way that invites candid answers. Recognize that because of power dynamics, employees might not feel psychologically safe enough to respond frankly to your questions. They might think their answers could cause you to view them unfavorably and close off future opportunities.  Take the time to formulate your questions in a way that will provide the information you need in a nonjudgmental manner. For example, saying, “I’d like to hear your thoughts on this …” is a good lead-in. Then, avoid interjecting your own thoughts and opinions or those of other co-workers.  Even in the healthiest of work environments, employees still might not feel comfortable sharing their opinions. Consider allowing them to do so anonymously through a suggestion box or survey.  **Mistake No. 3: Listening to respond, not to understand.**  Understanding another’s perspective requires listening deeply, but leaders often want to fix things, so they listen for opportunities to help. The person speaking wants to be heard, and they feel neither heard nor helped when the leader rushes to offer a solution. As we saw in the scenario above, it can seem dismissive.  Often leaders will suggest a different way to look at a situation before they actually understand the way the employee views it. When a leader explains their good intentions or reacts defensively, they make the conversation about the leader’s feelings and not about the employee’s perspective.  **Solution**: Listen deeply, and follow through with actions. Take notes and ask follow-up questions to truly understand an employee’s point of view, without contributing your own thoughts and reactions. Remember, you’re trying to learn their perspective, not evaluate it.  Once you’ve understood their perspective, don’t stop there. Employees will only feel heard and comfortable to share opinions in the future if they see their ideas are being used to guide actions. For an employee, there’s nothing worse than giving your heartfelt opinion and then having your manager discount it and do the opposite. Of course, you can’t fulfill every employee’s personal wish list, but acknowledging perspectives and showing how you use this information to take action will go a long way in making employees feel heard.  **The Neuroscience of Mindfulness**  Anyone can develop mindfulness by focusing on direct sensory experiences. Mindfulness is an idea that’s been around for thousands of years, originally emerging from Buddhist traditions. In modern times, researchers are doing interesting studies showing that mindfulness impacts many facets of the human experience.  However, convincing busy people who run companies and institutions that mindfulness is useful can be challenging. That’s because these people tend to spend less time thinking about themselves and other people and more time thinking about strategy, data, and systems. In general, they focus less on people and more on big-picture goals.  Therefore, speaking to an executive about mindfulness can be a bit like speaking to a classical musician about jazz: It might look like they could play a little Coltrane because they deal in sounds, but they haven’t developed the appropriate circuits for it.  I’ve taught mindfulness to deans of medical schools, senior executives at major technology firms, and business school students from dozens of countries. When you explain step by step how it works and how it affects your brain, and then give people a chance to experience it, even the most cynical, anti-self-awareness agitator can’t help but see the benefits. The key to getting them to try is to first explain the neuroscience involved. Here are some highlights of how mindfulness impacts the brain.  Mindfulness and the brain  A 2007 study by Norman Farb and colleagues at the University of Toronto broke new ground in our understanding of mindfulness from a neuroscience perspective. Farb and his co-workers discovered people have two distinct ways of interacting with the world, using two different sets of neural networks.  One is called the narrative network, which includes self-referential brain regions, such as the medial prefrontal cortex, and memory regions, such as the hippocampus — all part of what’s called the default mode network. A narrative is a story line with characters that interact with each other over time. This network earns its name because it’s active when you’re not focused on the external world and your mind is wandering, or when you’re thinking about yourself or others. For example, if you’re sitting on the edge of a jetty in summer, a nice breeze blowing through your hair and a cold beer in your hand, instead of taking in the beautiful day, you might find yourself thinking about what to cook for dinner that night and whether you’ll make a mess of the meal. This is your narrative network in action. It’s the network involved in planning, daydreaming, and ruminating.  The brain holds vast amounts of information about your own and other people’s histories. When the narrative network is active, you’re thinking about the history and future of yourself and all the people you know, and how this giant tapestry of information weaves together. When you experience the world using this network, you take in information from the outside world, process it through a filter of what everything means, and add your interpretations. Sitting on the dock with your narrative circuit active, a cool breeze isn’t a cool breeze — it’s a sign that summer will be over soon, which gets you thinking about where to go skiing and whether your ski suit needs cleaning.  The narrative network is active for most of your waking moments and doesn’t take much effort to operate. There’s nothing wrong with engaging this network, and in fact, it can help us solve problems via insight, which can drive innovation. The point here is you don’t want to limit yourself to only experiencing the world through this lens.  The second network the Farb study explored is an entirely different way of self-referential thought that focuses on the current moment. At NLI, we call this “direct experience.” Several brain regions become more active during direct experience, including the insula and somatosensory areas, all regions involved in perceiving our current bodily sensations, both internal and from our surroundings. So when this direct experience network is activated, you’re not thinking intently about the past or future, other people, or yourself — or considering much at all. Rather, you’re experiencing direct sensory information in real time. Sitting on the jetty, your attention is on the warmth of the sun on your skin, the cool breeze in your hair, and the cold beer in your hand.  Other studies have found that these two circuits, narrative and direct experience, are inversely correlated. In other words, if you think about an upcoming meeting while you wash dishes, you’re more likely to overlook a broken glass and cut your hand because the brain network involved in visual perception is less active. When the narrative experience is activated, you don’t see as much (or hear, feel, or sense anything as much) because you’re lost in thought. Sadly, even a beer doesn’t taste as good in this state.  Fortunately, this scenario works both ways. When you focus your attention on incoming data, such as the feeling of the water on your hands while you wash up, activation of the narrative circuitry is reduced. This explains why, for example, if your narrative circuitry is going crazy worrying about an upcoming stressful event, it helps to take a deep breath and focus on the present moment. All your senses “come alive” at that moment.  Let’s recap these ideas. You can experience the world through your narrative circuitry, which is useful for planning, goal setting, and strategizing. You can also experience the world more directly, which enables increased perception of sensory information. Experiencing the world through the direct experience network allows you to get closer to the reality of any event. You perceive more — and more accurate — information about events occurring around you. Noticing more real-time details makes you more flexible in how you respond to the world. You also become less imprisoned by the past, your habits, expectations, or assumptions and are better equipped to respond to events as they unfold.  In the Farb experiment, people who meditated regularly — and thus practiced noticing the narrative and direct experience paths — had stronger differentiation between the two paths. They knew which path they were on at any time and could switch between them more fluidly. In contrast, people who had not practiced noticing these paths were more likely to automatically take the narrative path.  Similarly, a study by researchers Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan found that people who scored high on a mindfulness scale were more aware of their unconscious processes. They also had more cognitive control, and a greater ability to shape what they do and say, than people lower on the mindfulness scale.  So why should you care? If you’re on the jetty in the breeze, and you’re someone with a good level of mindfulness, you’re more likely to notice that you’re missing a lovely day worrying about tonight’s dinner and turn your focus on the warm sun instead. When you shift your attention in this way, you change the way your brain interacts with all of the information it’s processing.  You don't have to sit still, but you do need to practice  Leading mindfulness researcher John Teasdale once explained, “Mindfulness is a habit; it’s something the more one does, the more likely one is to be in that mode with less and less effort ... It’s a skill that can be learned. It’s accessing something we already have. Mindfulness isn’t difficult. What’s difficult is to remember to be mindful.” I love this last statement. Mindfulness isn’t difficult: The hard part is remembering to do it.  The key is to practice focusing your attention on a direct sensation, and do so often. It helps to use a rich stream of data. For example, you can hold your attention to the feeling of your foot on the floor easier than the feeling of your little toe on the floor: There’s more data to tap into. You can practice mindfulness while you’re eating, walking, talking, or doing just about anything.  Building mindfulness doesn't mean you have to sit still and observe your breath. You can find a way that suits your lifestyle. Years ago, my wife and I built a 10-second ritual into the evening meal with our kids, which involves stopping and noticing three small breaths together before we eat. An added bonus: It makes a great dinner taste even better.  Whatever ritual you develop, practice it. The more mindful you become, the better decisions you’ll make, and the more you’ll achieve your goals. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1**: Individuals often find themselves distracted by past or future concerns during conversations, preventing them from connecting deeply with others and missing out on the full potential of the interaction.  **Solution 1:** Implement mindfulness practices to anchor attention in the present moment. Simple techniques, such as taking a few mindful breaths before starting a conversation, can help shift focus from internal narratives to the current interaction, enhancing attentiveness and engagement.  **Problem 2:** Miscommunication and misunderstandings can arise when individuals fail to fully grasp the experiences and perspectives of others, leading to weakened relationships and potential conflicts.  **Solution 2:** Foster neural synchronization by actively listening and sharing emotions during conversations. Encourage the practice of empathetic listening—focusing on the speaker's words, tone, and body language without judgment—to better align perspectives and foster mutual understanding.  **Problem 3:** Virtual communication often lacks the visual and auditory cues that help synchronize neural activity, making it challenging to establish and maintain strong connections.  **Solution 3:** Be intentional about seeking to connect in virtual settings by using video calls when possible to see and hear each other more clearly. Share emotions openly and encourage participants to express themselves fully, facilitating a sense of closeness and understanding even when physically apart. FAQS  * How can practicing mindfulness help me focus better during conversations? * What are some simple mindfulness techniques I can use to prepare for a meaningful interaction? * How does neural synchronization contribute to stronger connections with others? * In what ways can sharing emotions enhance communication and understanding in conversations? * What strategies can I use to stay engaged and connect effectively in virtual meetings? | |
| Habit 1:Connect efficientlySkill 2: Ensure shared understanding   Maria’s story:  The biggest government finance department conference of the year is just a week away, and Maria’s team is responsible for the evening reception. Maria wants to make sure, Kai her executive assistant, understands his responsibilities so no balls get dropped. Maria drafts an email:  [show email format]  Dear Kai,  As you are no doubt already aware, the upcoming reception closes out the largest event of the year for our department, during which we will strive to build stronger collaborative relationships with other departments and learn from experts in the field. It is also an opportunity to showcase our team and the accomplishments we’ve made this year.  To leverage our resources in the best possible way, I wanted to ensure you understand your responsibilities:   * Last-minute promotion — through the appropriate channels, contact the participant list and explain the value proposition of attending the reception. * Contact the caterer and confirm the food list is as we discussed two months ago. (Oh, that reminds me, I need to order some drinks and flatware.) * Print our department brochures to hand out — make sure we have enough. * Ensure we have the appropriate audiovisual equipment assembled for the videos and demos. * I’m sure there are a few other things I’m forgetting, but you should already have everything written down from last week’s team meeting.   Kai, I am counting on you to help make this reception a success. If you have any questions about your assigned tasks, let me know, but also, please understand that I am extremely busy and don’t have time to go over the details of every task. Given the extensive instruction you have been given over the past few months, I am certain that you are capable of making the correct decisions on your own.  Best,  Maria  Maria hits “send,” confident she’s given Kai everything he needs to execute her tasks. So she’s surprised when the event rolls around and there’s not enough food or brochures, and the videos and demos can’t be played because the adapter for the slide projector is missing.  Research  Thinking back to what we know about cognitive capacity, it’s no surprise that Kai didn’t completely understand his role at the bank’s event. When we hear or read an overly complex explanation, or someone goes off on a tangent, our attention wanes, and it’s hard to follow the person’s overall message. That’s because it isn’t succinct, specific, or generous — a technique we call SSG.  The reason we should be intentional about the way we communicate is because conversations can induce brain changes, creating either a receptive, trusting state or a closed, cautious demeanor driven by fear and anxiety. Thus, conversations can actually alter our brain chemistry, fostering the production of hormones and neurotransmitters. As we communicate, our brains produce a neurochemical mix that shapes our emotional experience, which is translated into our words and narratives. "Feel good" conversations prompt the release of dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins, promoting a sense of well-being. So when we communicate with the intention to be SSG, it not only helps ensure shared understanding, it can also help to engage others in a way that promotes trust, well-being, and maybe even insights.  So, how do you use SSG to communicate powerfully?   * Being succinct means getting your message across in as few words as possible. * Being specific is providing detail and using concrete, unambiguous language. * Being generous means communicating with appreciation for the listener's perspective.   ACTIVITY  Order the following phrases from most SSG to least SSG:   * I met with the team, and they said they should be able to meet the project deadline. But they need a list of employees who can assist so they can decide whether they need to hire an independent vendor. * I met with the team to discuss basic parameters of the project and assess their ability to execute on our timeline. They indicated they should be able to do this but will need to know what assets we already have to better understand if we’ll need to bring in a partner (I suggested an independent vendor and have pulled potential budgets for this). The team also asked for a brief on the project and examples of what we’re envisioning. * I met with the team, and they’re on track to meet the project deadline. They’ve asked for an inventory of assets so they can assess whether they need to bring in outside resources to get the project over the finish line.   Actions to choose from:   * When I’m explaining a task, I’ll think of how I can say it as succinctly, specifically, and generously (SSG) as possible. * If an unrelated idea pops up while I’m being SSG, I’ll write it down to address later instead of going off on a tangent. * If I need to send an important email, I’ll check the first draft carefully and revise to ensure I’m being SSG before hitting “send.”   Maria’s story, take two:  The biggest government finance department conference of the year is just a week away, and Maria’s team is responsible for the evening reception. Maria wants to make sure Kai, her executive assistant, understands his responsibilities so no balls get dropped. So Maria carefully drafts an email, revising it to make sure she’s being SSG:  [show email format]  Dear Kai,  The conference and the reception we are hosting is coming up quickly, and I know you're aware that the event will either help or hurt the reputation of the team, so it's important it goes very well. Thanks for your hard work so far! I just wanted to remind you of a few key tasks:   * Email the event flier to the conference participants tomorrow. * Contact the caterer and confirm the attached food list. Plan to have enough food for 500 people. * Print 500 copies of our department brochure. * Make sure our videos and demos are loaded on the laptop, and do a trial run with the slide projector the day before the event.   If you have any questions or can think of anything else I might be forgetting, please let me know!  Best,  Maria  Maria hits “send,” confident she’s given Cindy everything she needs to execute her tasks. Cindy follows up with a couple of questions, and the following week, the event goes off without a hitch.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 2: Ensure Shared Understanding, equips participants with the SSG technique, designed to refine communication skills through three key components: being Succinct, Specific, and Generous. This strategy aims to facilitate clearer, more effective interactions by aligning with the cognitive capacities of both the speaker and the listener, thereby fostering mutual understanding and enhancing collaborative efforts.  Participants will learn the importance of conciseness in communication, focusing on conveying messages in a clear and straightforward manner to avoid overloading the listener's prefrontal cortex (PFC). By honing the skill of being succinct, individuals can more effectively capture the essence of their message, making it easier for others to grasp and engage with the conversation.  Being specific is highlighted as a crucial aspect of ensuring that communications are accurately understood, providing enough detail to create a vivid mental map for the listener without veering into irrelevancy. This precision not only adds clarity but also builds certainty and trust between communicators, laying the groundwork for more productive and meaningful interactions.  The principle of being generous emphasizes the value of empathy and adaptability in communication, suggesting that tailoring messages to the listener's perspective, using their terminology, and sharing personal insights can significantly enhance relatedness and psychological safety. This approach not only enriches the conversation but also strengthens connections, making it a powerful tool for building rapport. Theory SSG: Succinct, Specific and Generous.  Being succinct: Many of us like to explain ourselves or tell “the whole story.” However, most of us as listeners have short attention spans, drifting off when the speaker goes off on the slightest tangent. When we are speaking, we want to work with the limitations of the other person’s PFC, which is easily overwhelmed. Therefore, the more simply and clearly we communicate, the easier it is for them to process the information and make new connections.  Being succinct is a learned skill. It requires you to think carefully before you talk, decide quickly on the essence of what you want to say, then say it in as few words as possible. The skill of talking succinctly is about getting to the heart of the issue. If we use a small amount of words when we are speaking, we place less load on the other person’s PFC. Remember, it has limited capacity and is easily distracted. Being succinct also forces us to get clear on what we actually want to say, which means our message is easier to understand.  Being specific means helping the other person understand exactly what you mean. Not being specific can sound to the listener like you are avoiding an issue or not completely engaged with them. It can create a lack of clarity and certainty. Being specific requires you to pay close attention to what the other person is saying so you can accurately reflect back what they said. Being succinct AND specific means including everything that is relevant and nothing irrelevant. If you are not succinct, you may lose people. But being succinct is not enough on its own.  Being specific means giving people enough information to create a mental map. It is about including every detail that is relevant and nothing that is irrelevant. It takes a bit more effort on the part of the person speaking but it is much easier on the brain of the listener. Being specific creates a toward state in the mind of the other person because it increases certainty.  Being generous is choosing words that will have the biggest positive impact on the other person. It means putting yourself in the other person’s shoes so you communicate in a way that they understand, for example, using their terminology rather than your own and being mindful of using jargon. One significant way to create a strong toward state in the brain of the other person is to increase relatedness, and we can do this by being generous.  This means sharing a bit of yourself—who you are as a person. It also means speaking so the other person can understand you easily by avoiding jargon and choosing words and concepts that they are likely to relate to.  In short, it is about using words that have a positive impact. Matching the other person’s energy is another generous act. Adjusting to their communication style, volume, and pace can help build relatedness and psychological safety.  Being generous is also being genuine and sharing appropriate things about yourself that might make the other person feel more comfortable. It is being willing to talk about difficult issues. Being generous takes the conversation to another level.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS  What is a brain-friendly way to communicate? Application How to be Succinct, Specific and Generous, also known as SSG.  How to be succinct:   * Think carefully before you talk, decide quickly on the essence of what you want to say, then say it in as few words as possible. * The skill of talking succinctly is about getting to the heart of the issue. * When others are not succinct, help move the conversation forward by summarizing and reflecting back what they say.   How to be specific:   * Including everything that is relevant and nothing irrelevant. * Giving people enough information to create a mental map.   How to be generous:   * Choose words that will have the biggest positive impact on the other person. * Speak so the other person can understand you easily by avoiding jargon and choosing words and concepts that they are likely to relate to. * Match the other person’s energy. * Adjust to their communication style, volume, and pace * Be genuine * Share appropriate things about yourself that might make the other person feel more comfortable. * Be willing to talk about difficult issues.   What are some tips to ensure shared understanding?  Do less: Provide long, detailed explanations that may confuse the core message.  Do more: Be succinct, delivering clear and concise messages that get to the point efficiently.  Do less: Make broad, vague statements that leave room for interpretation.  Do more: Be specific, offering precise information and concrete examples to ensure clarity.  Do less: Focus just on conveying your own perspective or directives.  Do more: Be generous, taking the time to understand the other person’s viewpoint and incorporating empathy in your responses.  Do less: Skip verifying understanding in the interest of saving time.  Do more: Regularly check for shared understanding, asking for feedback or clarification to ensure alignment.  Do less: Overwhelm with too much information at once, thinking it’s helpful.  Do more: Prioritize key points, presenting information in digestible, relevant chunks to avoid cognitive overload.  Do less: Assume that your initial explanation is fully understood.  Do more: Encourage questions and open dialogue, fostering an environment where seeking clarification is welcomed.  Do less: Deliver feedback or complex ideas without consideration of the recipient's perspective.  Do more: Tailor your communication, considering the recipient's knowledge, emotional state, and potential biases, to enhance receptivity and understanding.  This "do less/do more" format emphasizes the importance of effective communication strategies — being succinct to respect others’ cognitive bandwidth, being specific to avoid misunderstandings, and being generous to foster positive connections and shared understanding.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * How can I communicate more effectively? * How can I get my message across better? * How can I make sure my direct reports understand my expectations?  Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Lengthy explanations or providing too much irrelevant detail can overwhelm the listener's cognitive capacity, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective communication.  **Solution 1:** Practice being succinct by focusing on the essence of your message and conveying it in as few words as possible. Before speaking, take a moment to organize your thoughts and identify the core message you wish to communicate. This clarity will help prevent cognitive overload and ensure your message is understood.  **Problem 2:** Vague or non-specific language can leave the listener confused, unable to form a clear mental map of the message, which may result in unclear expectations or misaligned objectives.  **Solution 2:** Enhance specificity in your communication by including all relevant details and excluding irrelevant ones. Aim to provide a clear, concise description that allows the listener to visualize and fully comprehend your message. If necessary, follow up to ensure your explanation was understood as intended.  **Problem 3:** Communication that lacks personal touch or fails to consider the listener's perspective can lead to a sense of disconnection, reducing the effectiveness of the interaction and potentially harming the relationship.  **Solution 3:** Be generous in your communication by adopting the listener's terminology, sharing relevant personal insights, and adjusting to their communication style. This approach not only increases relatedness and psychological safety but also encourages a more engaging and meaningful exchange, strengthening the connection between communicators. FAQS  * How can I become more succinct in my communication without losing important details? * What strategies can I use to ensure I'm being specific enough in conversations? * Can being too generous in communication lead to oversharing? How do I find the balance? * What are some practical ways to practice being succinct, specific and generous in daily interactions? * How can I adjust my communication style to match the other person's energy effectively? | |
| Habit 1:Connect efficientlySkill 3: Accelerate insights (TAPS) [Maria’s story]  Maria: Hey, Annie. How’s it going with that contract to support our platform upgrades?  Annie: Not well. The vendor is complaining that he’s already worked the maximum number of hours he can, per the contract, and he wants to amend it.  Maria: Wait a minute — why has he already gone over the number of hours in his contract?  Annie: I’m not sure. I guess he underestimated how long the project would take.  Maria: You must not have given him sufficiently clear parameters.  Annie: I clearly spelled out what the project involved. It’s not my fault if he was overly optimistic about his timeline.  Maria: Well, in the future, you need to think more carefully about how long a project should take and build that into the contract. Now, we’re going to have to find someone in-house to finish the project.  Annie: That would be difficult because the vendor has all the files and context. It’d take too long to get anyone else up to speed.  Maria: In other words, we’re either going to go over time or over budget. Not a good situation. I’m going to have to think about this some more. We’ll talk tomorrow.  Annie: Okay.  ACTIVITY 1:  How do you typically handle a problem with a co-worker that seemingly has no solution?  a) Keep thinking about it until you find a solution  b) Tell the co-worker it's up to them to figure it out.  c) Ask questions to help them arrive at a solution.  d) Figure out who's to blame.  e) Something else.  Display results as a poll.  Research  How many times a week is a member of your team faced with a problem that seemingly has no good solution? When you focus on the problem or decide to just solve it yourself, like Maria did, you’re less likely to come up with ideas, much less motivate others to explore solutions. However, by asking the right questions and focusing on the solution, rather than the problem, you’re more likely to generate insights in yourself and others. Insights are a way of solving a problem in a nonobvious, seemingly sudden way that results in a burst of energy and motivation. That’s because having an insight causes the release of dopamine in areas of the brain associated with a strong feeling of reward. What’s more, insights can result in dorsal insular activity, which is thought to be responsible for the incredible feelings of enlightenment and clarity that come with insight generation.  As managers, we often jump immediately to trying to solve our employees’ problems. But when someone has their own insight, the energy boost it provides makes them more engaged and motivated. So the next time one of your direct reports is facing a challenge, instead of fixing the problem for them, you can ask “thinking questions” — questions that lead to insight. Instead of telling them about problems, ask them about solutions. To remember this, use the acronym TAPS (Tell – Ask – Problem – Solution). For example, instead of saying, “You need to contribute more to the team,” you could ask, “How might the team become more productive?” This encourages others to focus away from the problem so they’re more likely to form new neural connections. It also helps strengthen relationships between managers and employees in what’s known as “the dance of insight.”  Actions to choose from:   * If a direct report is at an impasse, I won’t immediately jump in to solve the problem for them. * If I’m trying to help someone have their own insight, I’ll ask “thinking questions.” * If I’m tempted to focus on a problem, I’ll ask about possible solutions instead.   Maria’s story, take two:  Maria: Hey, Maria. How’s it going with that contract to support our platform upgrades?  Annie: Not well. The vendor is complaining that he’s already worked the maximum number of hours he can, per the contract, and he wants to amend it.  Maria: Hmm. What do you think are some possible solutions?  Annie: Well, we could shift some of next month’s budget over to him, but that could create problems if we need the money next month.  Maria: Have you thought about other alternatives?  Annie: Well … I could look into next month’s budget and see if there’s any wiggle room. And I could ask the vendor to provide the files and a summary of what he’s done so far, so in the worst-case scenario, we could have someone in-house finish it up.  Maria: Those sound like fantastic ideas. Why don’t you dig into them and see what’s most viable?  Annie: Great, I will! And to prevent this situation from happening again, maybe we could get a better sense of how vendors are using their time by requesting a weekly audit?  Maria: That sounds like a good plan. Let’s discuss these ideas more at our next meeting.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 3: Accelerate Insights, empowers participants to help others generate insights and find solutions. This skill introduces the TAPS Model®—an acronym for Tell, Ask, Problem, Solution—guiding participants on how to shift their conversational focus towards eliciting solutions rather than dwelling on problems. Through strategic questioning and dialogue, this method enhances engagement, fosters autonomy, and nurtures a solution-oriented mindset.  Participants will explore the nuances of the TAPS model, learning to navigate conversations from the dual perspectives of problem-solving and insight generation. The model illuminates the importance of focusing on future solutions rather than past problems, advocating for a coaching approach that is particularly effective in complex, personal, or emotional scenarios where there is no singular correct answer.  Key strategies for accelerating insights include Emphasizing questions about solutions to inspire forward-thinking and innovation, and reducing reliance on telling or advising, which can inadvertently stifle creativity and autonomy.  By adopting the TAPS approach, participants will not only refine their communication skills but also become adept at facilitating insightful, empowering conversations. This skill is instrumental for leaders, managers, and team members aiming to enhance collaborative problem-solving, increase motivation, and drive meaningful progress within their teams and organizations. Theory The TAPS Model® shows the four different approaches we typically take when people come to us with a challenge. TAPS stands for Tell - Ask - Problem - Solution.  1. ASK about the PROBLEM (top left quadrant) - a retrospective conversation about the causes and roots of the issue.  2.TELL people the PROBLEM (bottom left quadrant) - we act in the role of critic, providing an analysis of what is not working.  3. TELL people the SOLUTION (bottom right quadrant) - we act in the role of mentor or trainer, offering a solution by tapping into our expertise.  4. ASK about the SOLUTION (top right quadrant) - a future-focused conversation in which we invite the other person to explore and develop their thinking about how to solve the challenge or issue.  The top right quadrant represents a coaching approach, which is ideal for managers who want to grow and develop their people.. It is ideal when an issue is complex, personal, or emotional, and where there is no single "correct" answer.  Here are some examples of questions that are not in the top-right quadrant of the TAPS Model. These tend to create a threat state and are unlikely to support insight generation:  Tell about the solution   * You’re too shy. You should speak up more. * You have been making errors in your reports. You should be more attentive to detail.   Ask about the problem   * Why do you think your emails are so unclear? * Your customer satisfaction rating is low. Why do you think that is?   Tell about the problem   * You had to stay late because you didn’t organize your time well. * You’re not identifying the problem because you are not actively listening to the customer.   What types of questions should I avoid if I want to help people have insights?  Here are some examples of the types of questions we often ask, that don’t usually lead to insight.  Giving advice – We enjoy giving advice but generally dislike getting it. Why? It tends to create social threats for the receiver in status and autonomy, and remember, threat is one of the conditions that inhibits insight.  Sometimes things that sounds like questions are actually suggestions in disguise. We call these “que-ggestions”! This can create similar threats to advice.  Focusing on the problem – this tends to create an away state.  Focusing on the details – These tend to create a noisy brain – we want a quiet brain for insight to occur  Asking why - this is another way to focus on the problem – and it tends to create a threat state.  Rushing to action too soon – this doesn’t leave much opportunity to look inward, which is how we make new and novel connections. It also threatens autonomy.  Perhaps you have asked some of these. Don’t worry, there are good reasons we turn to these approaches:   * Problems get our attention because we are wired to focus on threats. * It feels good to know the answer and try to help. * It feels faster to tell people what to do. * If we have an insight we get the dopamine, instead of the other person (the one who needs to take action). * We assume people think like us, but no two brains are alike.   Linear problem-solving is when we rely on what we already know. We use a structured process, following a series of steps to find the right answer. Nonlinear problem-solving is when we solve a problem in a less-structured, holistic, and flexible manner.  What is an insight?  From experience, we all know insights to be those “aha” moments when suddenly a great idea comes to mind. For example: Suddenly, you know who to put on a team for an important project or where you can get the funds to bring your initiative to life.  The brain tries to link new concepts with previously established patterns and information. Insights arise when new information is put together in particularly novel ways. However, before the moment of insight arises, the signals are relatively weak and disconnected compared to those that are available for analytical forms of processing. There are certain conditions, though, in which those weak signals are more likely to emerge.  Research shows that insights change the way information is linked in our minds. New neural connections and patterns of activation create changes in the way we think about and solve problems, which in turn can create a route for lasting behavior change.  Research suggests there are specific conditions that promote the likelihood of insight. Essentially, the experience of threat and cognitive load inhibit insight occurrence. There are, broadly, four conditions that allow the subtle connections to come together in a moment of insight.  Insights help us find solutions because they are an effective way to solve complex problems and have new ideas. These new and novel ideas occur because insights reorganize how information is linked across brain regions.  Insights can facilitate activation of the brain’s reward system. This may involve the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is associated with feelings of engagement.  Why are insights important?  When insights activate the brain’s reward system, they are often intrinsically motivating. This can lead to behavior change.  The brain behaves in a predictable manner in the moments leading up to insight.  Quiet: Insights are small numbers of neurons speaking, so we need a quiet brain to notice them. It’s like a phone ringing at a noisy party—you need the other people to be quiet so you can hear it.  Internally focused: We tend to close our eyes or look up to the ceiling just before an insight. We are reflecting. Insights generally come from the non-conscious connecting existing ideas and memories in new ways. Even when around others, you are focused inward and not ‘out’ with them.  Slightly positive: We have already looked at the impact of threat on our ability to see connections and be open to new ideas. To be ready for insight, we need to minimize the threat and be in a slight toward state.  Not thinking directly about the problem: This one is counter-intuitive, but when we focus on the problem, we get a loud and busy PFC; we become externally focused and we tend to feel more negative. We need to stop focusing directly on the problem to allow new ideas to emerge.  What is the definition of insight?  A nonobvious solution from the nonconscious that emerges suddenly into awareness and combines existing data in new ways.  NLI has spent over a decade studying which conditions enable insight generation. The consensus is that there are four key ingredients: quiet moments, looking inward, positive emotion, and distance from the problem.  The richest insights happen when people are in a good frame of mind and away from the issue, in a place where they can reflect quietly. Or to put it another way, far more than what you should do, insight is about what you don’t do.  Question: In my job, I am often required to ask people about their problems. Are you suggesting that ALL of my conversations have to happen in the ask/solution quadrant of the TAPS Model®?  Answer: No, it is quite normal for people to operate in all four quadrants during a typical day. We’re focusing on the ask/solution quadrant here because the focus is on facilitating powerful conversations, and this quadrant is the fastest, most efficient route for facilitating insights. It also tends to be the quadrant that the vast majority of us have the least experience using.  Question: I’ve been working on this skill for three weeks, and I still have a hard time asking questions that facilitate insight. Why is it so hard?  Answer: You’re not alone in feeling this way. Mastering a new skill takes time, practice, and conscious attention;  it demands a lot of your brain’s limited resources (e.g., the prefrontal cortex), and it’s mentally tiring. It’s naturally easier to respond from a habitual place because it takes fewer cognitive resources. Your brain has been responding to stimuli in habitual ways that are familiar and comfortable (e.g., asking about the problem) for a long time, and now you are learning to respond to familiar stimuli in new ways. Trust that your skills will improve with practice, and it will get easier.  THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * Why are insights important? * In my job, I am often required to ask people about their problems. Are you suggesting that ALL of my conversations have to happen in the ask/solution quadrant of the TAPS Model®? * I’ve been working on this skill for three weeks, and I still have a hard time asking questions that facilitate insight. Why is it so hard? * What if I don’t have time to help people generate insights?  Application What are some examples of questions in the top-right quadrant of the TAPS model: Ask about the solution   * What do you think your team needs? * What do you think the next step is? * How is this learning useful? * How can I help you think this through? * What would your ideal outcome be? * What ideas do you have so far? * What skills would you like to develop? * What support do you need to ensure success? * What is your objective? * What is your vision for this area? * What would you like the desired outcome to be? * Could you paint the picture of the ideal outcome of this issue? * What do you want to achieve here? * What is your goal? * Based on this insight, what do you think would be the next step forward for you? * What is your plan for achieving these targets? * Now that you have had this new understanding about the situation, what do you think you can do? * What planning do we need to implement to ensure your success in this area? * What are your options based on this insight? * How might you start making a plan to move forward in this area? * How clear is your plan for achieving this objective? * What are the milestones for achieving this goal? * What are the major steps you can see? * What are you prepared to do to make this goal happen? * What are some of the alternatives for moving forward? * What would you like to commit to based on this new clarity? * What is one step you could take towards that this week? * How can you apply that insight into other areas of your life now? * What will you complete by next week? * How could you apply this new learning?   Thinking questions   * How long have you been thinking about this? (Days/weeks/months/years) * How often do you find yourself thinking about this? (How many times each hour/day/week?) * How frequently are you thinking about it? * When are you most likely to think about this? * How long do you think about this when you do think about it? (Minutes/hours) * How strong is this thought with you on a scale of 1 to 10? * How important is this topic to you, for example, on a scale of 1 to 10? * How high is this in your priorities now, e.g. is it in your top 3, 5, or 10 priorities? * What priority would you like it to be? * How committed are you to resolving this topic, on a scale of 1 to 10? * What is the ratio of thinking you do about the problem as compared to the solution? * How motivated are you to resolve this topic? * How much effort have you invested in thinking about this? * How do you feel about the thinking you’ve given this so far? * What common threads/patterns do you notice in relation to your thinking about this and other issues? * How clear is your thinking about this? * What stage are you at in your thinking about this? * How could you take your thinking to the next step? * What lens might you be looking through in your thinking? * What aspects of your thinking are most important/effective? * How does your thinking about this compare to your thinking about other topics? * Can you see any gaps in your thinking? * What needs unpacking? * What are you not thinking about that might help you find resolution? * What ideas/thoughts have crossed your mind about this that you may have dismissed? * How do you feel about what you’ve done so far? * From the thinking that you have already done on this, what are the main insights you have had about this up to now? * What are your insights so far? * What themes are emerging? * How could you think about this more deeply?   How can I set the stage for more insights in the workplace?   * Use storytelling to help people see connections and consolidate information in new and memorable ways. * Normalize time blocking for focus and deep work. People need uninterrupted spans of time to develop insights. * Encourage autonomy. Research shows autonomy drives innovation by enabling independent thinking, problem-solving, and experimentation with less fear of failure. * Assemble cognitively diverse teams to focus on solutions, not problems. Research shows diverse teams are smarter, produce more ideas, collaborate better, and innovate more. * Insist that everyone take breaks to benefit from the results of downtime. Restful moments are essential for insight generation.   Routinely creating the conditions for insight generation is a crucial first step for organizations focused on solving complicated problems in an ever-changing environment.  What are some examples of if-then plans to accelerate insights?   * If I feel like I’m expected to have all the answers, then I’ll focus on asking questions that will help us find an answer together. * If I notice I am sharing too many of my own experiences, then I’ll ask employees for their own perspectives.   What are some tips to accelerate insights?  Do less: Tell people what you think the solution is immediately.  Do more: Ask questions that lead individuals to find their own solutions, aligning with the TAPS model's emphasis on asking rather than telling.  Do less: Pose closed, yes/no questions that limit depth in conversation.  Do more: Craft open-ended questions that encourage exploration and deeper thinking, fostering a richer soil for insights.  Do less: Maintain a rigid focus on the problem as stated, potentially restricting thinking.  Do more: Expand the discussion by inviting them to consider the situation from different perspectives to uncover underlying factors and possible solutions.  Do less: Keep the conversation strictly on a rational, surface-level analysis.  Do more: Introduce questions that prompt emotional reflection and connection, deepening engagement with the issue.  Do less: Impose a hurried atmosphere, rushing through problem-solving stages.  Do more: Cultivate patience and presence, creating a serene environment where insights aren’t forced but naturally arise.  Do less: Dive straight into group brainstorming.  Do more: Allow time for individual quiet reflection before sharing ideas as a group.  Do less: Overlook the importance of pausing and reflecting amid discussions.  Do more: Integrate moments of silence after thought-provoking questions, allowing the brain to process and connect information in a way that can lead to insights.  Do less: Tell people your ideas  Do more:Ask people for their ideas  Do less: Ask multiple questions at one time  Do more:Provide reflection time after a question  Do less: Rush the conversation  Do more:Let people mull over ideas  Do less: Ask questions about the details  Do more:Ask questions about the process  Do less: Pressure for a result  Do more:Allow enough time in meetings  Do less: Ask ‘why’ questions  Do more:Ask ‘how’ questions  Do less: Criticize or dismiss ideas  Do more:Be non-judgemental, encourage all ideas  This "do less/do more" format emphasizes the use of the TAPS model alongside strategic questioning and environment shaping. It encourages a shift towards exploratory questioning, patience, and open-mindedness that facilitates the natural emergence of insights.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * How can I help others have more insights? * How can I increase innovation in my team? * How can I empower my team to find their own solutions instead of relying on me for answers? * What are some questions that help people have insights? * How can I help someone solve a complicated problem?  Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Leaders and colleagues often default to offering solutions or advice when faced with a team member's challenge, inadvertently stifling personal growth and insight generation.  **Solution 1:** Shift to a coaching mindset by focusing on asking about solutions rather than telling. Encourage individuals to explore their own paths to resolution by asking open-ended questions that prompt them to reflect on future-oriented solutions. This not only empowers them to develop their own insights but also enhances their problem-solving skills.  **Problem 2:** Discussions that focus primarily on dissecting the problem can lead to a threat state, reducing the likelihood of insight and creative problem-solving.  **Solution 2:** Utilize the "Ask about the Solution" quadrant of the TAPS model to guide conversations towards future-focused solutions. By asking questions that encourage individuals to think about potential outcomes and actions, you create a positive, toward state that facilitates insight and innovation.  **Problem 3:** Team members may feel disengaged or unmotivated if they perceive that their input isn't valued or if they're not encouraged to contribute to problem-solving.  **Solution 3:** Foster an environment that values autonomy and collaborative solution-finding by consistently applying the TAPS approach in interactions. Encourage team members to offer their ideas for solutions and provide support in exploring these ideas further. Recognize and validate their contributions to reinforce their engagement and intrinsic motivation. Blog posts Non-collaborative time  In their quest to collaborate productively, break down silos, and create “alignment,” organizations can get so focused on teamwork that they forget the value of good old-fashioned solitary toil.  There’s no doubt that effective teamwork is critical for an organization. From the pyramids of Egypt to the mRNA vaccines for COVID-19, we think of invention and innovation as social processes, knowing that teams of people working together can achieve astonishing feats that would never be possible for an individual. But that doesn’t mean collaboration is all that matters.  On the contrary, a recent study found that when people collaborate constantly while trying to solve complex problems, the quality of solution actually declines. Social influence leads to copying, undermining the beneficial effects of cognitive diversity — like the way sharing ideas too early on in a brainstorming session reduces their quality. People hear one good idea and stop thinking, leading to premature convergence on a suboptimal solution.  This might imply that the best approach is no collaboration at all — to let the highest performers work independently without letting low performers stop them prematurely. But actually, the study found that groups produced better solutions when they first let people work on their own and then come together to compare notes and iterate. Counterintuitively, low performers’ ideas helped the high performers achieve even better solutions. The answer, according to the study: “Organizations should be redesigned to intermittently isolate people from each other’s work.”  Here’s the big problem: while we have an intuitive belief that brainstorming is inherently a good thing, and that it leads to more strong ideas and away from groupthink, science has consistently proven that’s not true. Jonah Lehrer’s 2012 New Yorker piece on groupthink might summarize it the best: “Decades of research have consistently shown that brainstorming groups think of far fewer ideas than the same number of people who work alone and later pool their ideas[4] .”Here’s an Even more dramatic summary in HBR, summarized by: “But no study has proven that brainstorming works well, even though it has been the go-to method for idea generation since 1953.”  In short, getting together in the office, while it might feel good, doesn’t increase original, creative thinking. If anything it reduces it, and increases incremental thinking or expanding on what you already know. It turns out, to increase actual creative thinking, you need something rare in a busy office. One of the reasons that offices are not generally good for innovation, as we explained in a 2016 HBR piece, is that insights tend to emerge from moments of quiet, and offices are notoriously terrible for finding quiet, nap pods be damned. Researchers have recently begun to pay more attention to the benefits of quiet for insight. And the ultra-quiet state of meditation has been linked to better decision making, suggest findings published in Psychological Science. People in the study made smarter decisions after just 15 minutes of undisturbed time spent meditating because it made them more resistant to their own biases. What’s more: Walking might in fact spur your next insight, according to scientists.  All these elements of work — quiet, walking, some autonomous control over your day vs. being pulled in different directions from your desk — are much more possible at home (or at a co-working) than in an office. Back in 2012, as we wrote about in another HBR piece, we collected data from 6,000 employees in concert with a large healthcare company. We asked about where people did their best thinking. Only 10 percent said it happened at work.  In a hybrid environment, if you want to lift innovation, consider banning meetings before 11am, as studies have shown that people do their best creative work first thing. Leave space for people to reflect, whether at work or home. Consider “No-Zoom Fridays” or ‘Minimal meeting Mondays.” Consider reducing 30-minute meetings to 25, and one-hour meetings to 50 minutes. The more space between meetings, the more insights people are likely to have.  Understanding Insight  As a manager, you want to bring your employees to have insights of their own, as opposed to telling them what to do and micromanaging them on tasks. When employees generate their own insights, it motivates and engages them. It also saves time for the manager.  Andy Grove, a founder of Intel, always said that the goal of a good manager is to make themselves unnecessary. While that’s terrifying to many managers (and our brains), it’s also very true. And if you move your employees to generate their own insights, they can act in your place on certain topics, which frees up time for bigger picture discussions and actions.  To help employees generate insights, ask questions — but not about the deadlines, or the pace of work, or specific bullet items. Ask bigger questions about how projects connect, how things are flowing, roadblocks and challenges, etc.  Ask about solutions, not problems.  Working through the “why” and “how” of issues instead of the more basic questions moves employees towards insight faster — and when you have limited time with them, across distance, this should be your goal.  Other ways that managers can support employees in generating insights, as we mentioned in an October 2016 Harvard Business Review article:  Let them take breaks between meetings and find some alone time. Encourage an empty conference room or, even better, leave the office and take a walk outside. (Walking might in fact spur your next insight, according to scientists.)  Allow some downtime on a regular basis — even small doses can have a big impact. Encourage them (and do it yourself!) to turn your devices off for several hours a day – or several days a week if you can. This way your mind will be truly free to wonder, and your brain won’t miss the next light bulb moment when it happens.  Remember to take a break from any decision-making process. And once you are taking it, focus on something else. Exercise is a foolproof way to take your mind off work, so put a daily workout on your calendar the same way you would schedule a meeting with a client or boss.  All these help employees (and you) find quiet signals — also called “weak activations” — in the brain, which create more A-HA moments and insights.  And overall, asking questions about solutions, i.e. having a real two-way synchronous conversation on the business and the strategy and the long-term, increases reflection and raises a sense of status and autonomy in our brains. Telling? That decreases both. It’s about real conversations and moving employees to insight, as opposed to task-based check-ins. FAQS  * How can I effectively shift from telling solutions to asking about solutions in conversations? * What strategies can I use to keep the focus on future solutions rather than dwelling on past problems? * Can you provide examples of questions that fall into the "Ask about the Solution" quadrant of the TAPS model? * How do I encourage team members to actively engage in generating their own insights and solutions? * What are the common pitfalls when trying to implement the TAPS model in daily interactions, and how can I avoid them? | |
| Habit 2: Set the right courseSkill 1: Personalize interactions (Threat within a 1:1: overwhelming, mild, manageable threat-scarf S and R) (M) Chayton Government (Filipino) 2, 9, 13 Finance  **[Michelle’s story]**  *Michelle is a newly promoted manager of customer service at a utility company. Her overall goal is to increase the efficiency of her team.*  Michelle is reading over last month’s customer service quality reports prepared by Ethan, an employee she’s recently tasked with compiling them. She notices several missing items, which lead to a rosier picture of the team’s response times and resolutions than reality. Although this is the first time Ethan has completed this type of report, Michelle is frustrated. She gave Ethan clear instructions and even a prior report to use as an example. She calls Ethan into her office and points out the missing items. “I don’t understand how you could have made these mistakes. Did you not double-check your work? Or were you trying to cover something up? Either way, it’s inexcusable.” Ethan flushes a deep red and stammers something about how he wasn’t clear which section those data points belonged in. “It seems pretty obvious to me,” Michelle replies. “I want a revised version by the end of the day.” Ethan works late into the night to fix his errors, and the next morning, he starts looking for a new job.  **Research**  As leaders, why do we often jump to blame? One reason could stem from a phenomenon called the fundamental attribution error (FAE). This is a tendency, or mental shortcut, that can lead to unjust and erroneous assumptions about individuals. This is especially true for those that hold a position of power. It can lead us to attribute others' behavior to their internal traits rather than considering situational factors. What this results in is unfair judgments or blame. The first step toward personalizing interactions with our direct reports is to recognize this tendency and build strategies to maintain an open-minded approach. By consciously acknowledging this mental shortcut, we can strive to comprehend people as unique individuals and consider their perspectives before making hasty judgments.  The next step is to keep the level of perceived threat in any interaction as low as possible. As leaders, we enter any one-on-one conversation with direct reports with an imbalance of power in our favor, leaving the other person in a mild threat state from the beginning of the interaction. In this case, Michelle only made the situation worse by jumping to conclusions and harshly communicating her frustrations to Ethan, causing him to immediately feel a greater level of threat. Research shows that our brains are organized to be highly sensitive to potential threats in our environment. We can easily distinguish among threats that are manageable and not very distracting (Level 1 threats), those that are mild and slightly distracting (Level 2 threats), and those that are overwhelming (Level 3 threats). As perceived threats increase, our control over brain regions responsible for executive function decreases, making it harder to have self-regulation. Here, Ethan was driven into an overwhelming state of threat: He became flushed, was unable to respond thoughtfully, and pushed himself to stay up most of the night, but then also realized he needed to move away from this source of threat and find another job.  One way to bring others’ threats to a manageable level is to leverage The SCARF® Model and use it to personalize the interaction. Specifically, by sending rewards in any of the domains, you can reduce the listener’s threat response and get them to engage in the conversation. For example, instead of starting out a conversation with blame or accusations, start by asking them for their thoughts or challenges they faced on the project so you can help them figure out where they made a wrong turn. This process will provide them a sense of relatedness and of autonomy.  **ACTIVITY 1:**  What would you do if a direct report made a mistake that, on the surface, seems unethical?   1. Fire them. There’s no place for unethical behavior in this company. 2. Accuse them of acting unethically and tell them you’re reporting them to HR. 3. Ask them why they would deliberately disobey company rules and do the wrong thing. 4. Assume the mistake was accidental. Use it as a learning opportunity, and ask them to fix it.   [We could display results as a poll, and above the bars on the graph, we could indicate the different levels of threat (a-b: Level 3, c: Level 2, d: Level 1)]  **ACTIVITY 2:**  *Given what you’ve learned, begin a conversation with a direct report who just made a potentially unethical mistake.*  *Draft a sentence you would use to reduce their threat level and name the SCARF® domain the reward falls within. "I'd say XXX to reward their sense of xxx.”*  **Actions to choose from:**   * + If I see an error, then I will pause and remind myself not to jump to the conclusion that it results from incompetence or fraud.   + If I need to discuss a mistake with an employee, then I’ll plan how to make their threat level manageable instead of overwhelming.   + If a direct report makes a mistake, then I’ll consider it a learning opportunity.   **Michelle’s story, take two:**  Michelle is reading over last month’s customer service quality reports prepared by Ethan, an employee she’s recently tasked with compiling them. She notices several missing items, which lead to a rosier picture of the team’s response times and resolutions than reality. Although this is the first time Ethan has completed this type of report, Michelle is frustrated. She gave Ethan clear instructions and even a prior report to use as an example. But she takes a few deep breaths and reminds herself this is the first time Ethan has completed such a report, and maybe he misunderstood a few things. She realizes her initial assumption was to view Ethan in a negative light but understands that she doesn't have evidence of that, and is open to other possibilities. Michelle calls Ethan into her office and says, “I noticed some missing data points here. Is there a reason you didn’t include them?” Ethan looks confused for a moment and then says he wasn’t sure which section they belonged in, and he meant to follow up with Michelle but forgot in his rush to meet the deadline. Michelle realizes she didn’t explain the process as clearly as she thought. “I'm sorry. I should have made that more clear. In the future, please let me know if you’re unsure about anything. Do you think you could have a revised version of the report finished by the end of the day tomorrow?” Ethan says, “Sure, no problem.” He completes the report in time, having learned a lot about the process.  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 1: Personalize Interactions, empowers participants to refine their interpersonal communication through the lens of the SCARF® Model. This model delineates five domains—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—that influence our social interactions by either serving as threats or rewards. Understanding and applying SCARF® principles enables individuals to consciously navigate conversations, fostering environments that minimize perceived threats while maximizing feelings of reward.  Participants will explore strategies for sending positive SCARF signals across various contexts, thereby enhancing collaboration, creativity, and overall workplace well-being. By learning to tailor interactions that uplift others' sense of status, provide clarity and certainty, respect autonomy, foster a sense of belonging (relatedness), and uphold fairness, participants can significantly improve team dynamics, motivation, and productivity.  This skill set is crucial for anyone looking to:   * Navigate social interactions more effectively. * Foster a supportive and inclusive team environment. * Enhance personal and team resilience to challenges. * Drive engagement and motivation through understanding and addressing core social needs.   Participants will be equipped with practical tools to personalize interactions, transforming everyday communications into opportunities for positive engagement and development. This approach not only benefits individual growth but also contributes to a more cohesive, innovative, and thriving organizational culture. Theory The SCARF® Model provides a way of bringing conscious awareness to your interactions. It is a tool for thinking about the ways we socially threaten and reward others, whether we mean to or not, and the ways they socially threaten and reward us. It helps alert you to people’s core concerns (which they may not even understand themselves) and shows you how to adjust your words and actions for a more positive impact.  There are areas of the brain that detect threat, real or perceived, to help us avoid danger. Our brain is also equipped to notice and register potential reward that helps us know when to continue and later repeat what we are doing. When we experience strong feelings of threat or reward, these brain systems tend to take over. When we experience too much threat our more automatic, primitive brain systems tend to drive our behavior. Under conditions of high threat, we may experience a fight-or-flight response and it becomes challenging for our executive functions, involved in high-level thought processes, to work optimally.  However, there is an imbalance that is important to keep in mind. When presented with potential threat, we respond more powerfully and quickly. This is to say that threat is a more strong and urgent system than reward. At the same time, when we feel threatened, we have a hard time being creative, opening to ideas and input, and coming to new insights. Conversely, when we feel a sense of reward, we have an easier time collaborating with others, thinking creatively, and generating new ideas. Thus, to help people be mentally well-equipped for challenges at  work, it’s important to mitigate the experience of threat and increase the experience of reward.  REFERENCES:  Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. Review of General Psychology, 5(4) 323-37.  Lieberman, M.D., & Eisenberger, N.I. (2008). The pains and pleasures of social life: A social cognitive neuroscience approach. NeuroLeadership Journal, 1, 38-43. Rock, D. (2008). SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. NeuroLeadership Journal, 1, 44-52.  **THEORY: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:**   * Do I really need to learn “soft skills”? * My management style is not “warm and fuzzy”, is SCARF relevant to me? * Is social and emotional intelligence important as a manager?    Application How to send positive SCARF signals:  Positive signals for Status   * Ask questions to help people find their own solutions, and provide suggestions only when asked. * Have complex conversations privately * Praise for growth, especially publicly * Collaborate for alternative solutions * Help people see and celebrate their wins * Show that you believe people are competent and capable * Be forgiving when people are experiencing change and accelerated growth * Give people your full attention and show you are listening * Share positive feedback and appreciation * Seek input and ideas from others * Schedule follow up conversations. * Make time for urgent requests to meet. * Focus the conversation on the other person and give them space to talk. * Invite people to challenge your opinion. * Explicitly discuss why speaking up is valued. * Treat mistakes as learning tools. * Role model being a learner and not having all the answers. * Ask for feedback. * Invite people to give themselves feedback before offering your perspective. * Provide feedback that balances positives and improvements, preferably only when asked.   Positive signals for Certainty   * Clarify expectations often * Communicate frequently and openly * Stick to agreements * Keep stakeholders and teams informed * Make the implicit more explicit * Provide clarity via regular updates, even if details are uncertain * Keep people in-the-loop * Start meetings and conversations with a clear context and agenda. * Check everyone is aligned on next steps * Express confidence in people’s ability to handle challenging situations.   Positive signals for Autonomy   * Provide choice on how to proceed * Make decisions as a team * Be open to the ideas of others * Co-create clear goals, allow autonomy on how to achieve * Provide choices within clear guidelines * Help others identify what they can control * Seek input from others to develop the agenda for a meeting or conversation. * Partner with others to agree on next steps.   Positive signals for Relatedness   * Encourage and focus on shared goals to create a sense of team * Foster shared experiences * Promote positive social interactions * Build opportunities to connect * Show deep empathy for each other's experience * Keep coming back to shared goals * Be on camera during virtual interactions, if possible * Validate people’s experiences and feelings. * Recognize and acknowledge emotion * Give people space to talk about what’s on their mind and ask questions to uncover their experience. * Be curious about other people’s motivations. * Help others label their emotions. * Acknowledge discomfort and engage in difficult conversations.   Positive signals for Fairness   * Respect expertise and experience * Gather input widely (when possible) * Recognize people’s contributions * Equalize access to resources and opportunities * Be transparent * Name the “elephant in the room”. * Accept and acknowledge individual variation in capacity * Communicate the reasons behind decisions. * Address issues without assigning blame.   SCARF signals to avoid because they tend to cause threat:  Status signals to avoid   * Challenge people publicly * Tell people their ideas are wrong * Focus only on areas for improvement * Be distracted or multitask when others speak * Give only corrective feedback * Do most of the talking * Assume no follow-up conversation is needed. * Put off requests for urgent requests to meet. * Focus the conversation on yourself and do most of the talking. * Defend your opinion and shut down disagreement. * Assume people will speak up if they need to. * Treat mistakes as failures. * Role model being the expert in the room and having all the answers. * Give advice or make lots of suggestions * Assume employees will give you feedback if required. * Give unsolicited feedback.   Certainty signals to avoid   * Be unclear with expectations * Keep information to yourself * Change plans at the last minute * Avoid providing updates until information is available * Assume what’s obvious to you is obvious to * Others * Leave people out-of-the-loop * Start meetings or conversations without context or agenda. * Assume others are clear on next steps. * Express concern or doubt about people’s ability to handle challenging situations.   Autonomy signals to avoid   * Make decisions for the group * Disregard ideas that are not your own * Set goals for people and monitor their progress * Impose team rules * Micromanage to increase your own sense of certainty * Set a meeting or conversation agenda without input from others. * Dictate next steps to others.   Relatedness signals to avoid   * Set people up to compete with each other * Allow people to work in isolation * Jump straight into business and deliverables at the start of a conversation. * Assume people feel they are part of “one team” * Stay off camera during virtual interactions * Challenge or minimize the validity of someone’s experience or feelings. * Ignore emotion * Assume you understand someone’s motivation or experiences. * Label the emotions you see in others. * Offer empathy and lean in to support others when they are struggling. * Avoid uncomfortable conversations. * Hesitate to offer support or discuss difficult topics.   Fairness signals to avoid   * Play favorites * Solicit ideas from a few select people * Take credit for other people’s work * Keep the reasons behind decisions to yourself * Avoid talking about the “elephants in the room” * Find who’s responsible and assign blame.     What are some tips to personalize interactions?  Do less: Make assumptions about individual motivations and preferences.  Do more: Ask questions to understand each person’s SCARF® drivers, personalizing interactions based on their needs for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.  Do less: Use a one-size-fits-all approach to project assignments and roles.  Do more: Consider individual SCARF® profiles when assigning roles, enhancing their sense of Status and Fairness by aligning tasks with their strengths and interests.  Do less: Apply blanket policies without considering individual circumstances.  Do more: Offer flexibility where possible to accommodate personal needs, strengthening perceptions of Fairness and Autonomy.  Do less: Communicate in a generic, impersonal manner.  Do more: Personalize your communication style to resonate with the SCARF® drivers of the individual, ensuring your interactions are meaningful and positively received.  Do less: Approach every one-to-one conversation with a standardized agenda.  Do more: Customize meeting agendas based on the direct report’s individual SCARF® needs, creating space for their priorities and concerns.  Do less: Give generic praise or feedback that lacks personal relevance.  Do more: Tailor praise and feedback to resonate with the direct report’s SCARF® profile, acknowledging their unique contributions and areas for growth.  Do less: Disregard the emotional undercurrents in conversations.  Do more: Tune into and address emotional cues, especially related to SCARF® elements, to maintain a positive emotional climate.  Do less: Enforce decisions without input, impacting the direct report’s sense of autonomy and status.  Do more: Involve direct reports in decision-making processes, validating their Autonomy and enhancing their Status.  Do less: Communicate future plans or changes without consideration for the direct report’s need for certainty.  Do more: Provide clear, forthcoming information about future plans, increasing Certainty and reducing anxiety.  Do less: Overlook opportunities to connect on a personal level.  Do more: Cultivate a sense of Relatedness by sharing appropriate personal experiences and showing genuine interest in their life outside work.  Do less: Apply a blanket approach to setting expectations and evaluating performance.  Do more: Consider the direct report’s SCARF® profile when setting goals and assessing performance, ensuring a sense of Fairness and relevance.  By employing these strategies, leaders can send strong positive signals across the SCARF® domains, tailoring their approach to meet the psychological needs of their team members, thereby personalizing interactions in a way that fosters engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.  APPLICATION: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS:   * How can I improve relationships with my employees? * How can I better motivate my direct reports? * How can I make employees feel valued? * How can I improve engagement? * How do I improve my social intelligence? * How do I improve my emotional intelligence?  Blog posts 5 Ways to Spark (or Destroy) Your Employees’ Motivation  Conversations are much more than a simple exchange of words. Consciously or not, every time we interact with someone, we’re meeting some of their social needs and perhaps depriving them of others. That is, we’re using language and engaging in behavior that either uplifts and motivates people or causes them to withdraw and shut down.  When it comes to workplace interactions, research makes it clear that leaders can maximize engagement and drive lasting performance when they help their team members meet one another’s needs.  So which needs should leaders focus on?  Over a decade ago, NLI identified five such domains in humans’ social experience: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. These domains make up The SCARF® Model, which we’ve outlined below.  Status  Status is the drive we feel to stand out from the crowd. When we share our new ideas and receive credit for a job well done, status is that glow of importance and value we’re looking for.  Leaders may erode employees’ sense of status if they disregard those new ideas or take credit for others’ work. On the other hand, they can bestow status rewards when they share employees’ accomplishments with the wider team — or better yet, give employees the floor to do so themselves.  Certainty  Humans naturally like to know what’s going on. We like to understand our surroundings and be able to predict outcomes. At work, we feel threats to our certainty when our roles or responsibilities aren’t clear or when leaders announce changes are coming without being clear about what they are and who they’ll impact.  Leaders can offer up certainty rewards by making their expectations known and by being as transparent as possible.  Autonomy  Generally speaking, we all like to feel a sense of control over the work we do and the decisions we make.  When leaders involve themselves with every little detail of their team members’ work, they risk creating threats to people’s autonomy. (This is why micromanaging feels so offensive.) However, when leaders give employees the time and space to do their work, or the option to choose the work location that allows them to be most productive, they send a much more rewarding signal that they trust and value the person’s ability to get things done.  Relatedness  Whether or not we mean to, humans draw boundaries around their groups. Some people are part of an “in-group,” while others fall in the “out-group.” In-groups and out-groups crop up all the time at work. For leaders, the goal is to expand the in-group and shrink the out-group to increase the sense of relatedness across the organization.  Relatedness is the sense that we belong — that we’re in the in-group. Leaders can use language such as “we” and “us” to promote that feeling instead of language like “you,” “me,” and “they,” which signals a clear boundary between groups. Indeed, political research finds that using collective pronouns can increase a politician’s chances of getting elected.  Fairness  Lastly, humans innately want to feel a sense of equity in social interactions. We prefer what’s justified over what’s tilted in one party’s favor.  Leaders can go a long way in promoting fairness through acts of transparency. For example, when making decisions, leaders can communicate their thought process behind picking one choice over another. When employees don’t get the full picture and start to invent alternate stories, it may increase the chance people feel slighted.  In all cases, sending SCARF® rewards goes a long way toward making employees feel valued, engaged, and inspired to commit to their work, whereas threatening these domains has the opposite effect. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Leaders and team members may inadvertently threaten the SCARF® domains of others by not recognizing or addressing individual social needs, leading to decreased engagement and productivity.  **Solution 1**: Increase awareness of the SCARF® model and actively apply it in interactions. This involves identifying and understanding the unique drivers of each team member and consciously tailoring communication and actions to support their needs for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.  **Problem 2:** Uniform communication styles can fail to resonate with diverse team members, potentially sending negative signals across SCARF® domains.  **Solution 2:** Develop and practice adaptable communication strategies that consider individual preferences and needs. This might include adjusting the level of detail shared for those needing more Certainty or providing more autonomy in how tasks are completed for those valuing Autonomy.  **Problem 3:** Perceptions of unfairness can quickly erode trust and motivation, especially when contributions are not acknowledged equitably or decisions seem opaque.  **Solution 3:** Foster an environment of transparency and inclusivity where decisions are explained, contributions are recognized, and feedback is sought and valued. Implementing regular check-ins and feedback sessions can help ensure that all team members feel their voices are heard and valued, promoting a sense of Fairness and Relatedness. FAQS  * How can I identify which SCARF® domains are most important to each of my team members? * What are some effective strategies to enhance a sense of Certainty in a constantly changing work environment? * How can I provide feedback in a way that uplifts Status without creating a threat to others' sense of Fairness? * In what ways can I foster Autonomy while ensuring alignment with team goals and objectives? * What practical steps can I take to build Relatedness in a remote or hybrid team setting? | |
| Habit 2: Set the right courseSkill 2: Set great goals Michelle’s story:  Michelle is having a one-on-one on Zoom with one of her direct reports, Eduardo, an experienced customer service representative, to set goals for the upcoming quarter. Michelle thought it would be a good idea to let Eduardo come up with his own ideas for goals so that he felt ownership of them — and it would save time in the meeting. Eduardo shares his screen and shows Michelle a page full of his objectives. Eduardo appears to have been exhaustive, defining everything he wants to accomplish, and Michelle feels good about how thorough he’s been.  A month later, Michelle asks Eduardo how his goals are progressing. Eduardo looks at her vaguely before saying, “Oh, the list of things to get done.” He pulls it up and murmurs, “Yeah, I’ve done a few.” Michelle isn’t sure what to say next, but it’s clear her goal-setting process didn’t really work. What’s she missing?  Research  Michelle has made a great first step in understanding the need to set goals. Studies have consistently shown the positive effects of goal setting on performance. However, achieving goals can be challenging, especially when faced with an exhaustive and unorganized list, as prioritization is one of the keys to progress.  Michelle could have helped Eduardo with his goal setting by advising him on where to focus attention first and making sure they agreed on the “why” behind each goal, which is central for tapping into the motivational brain circuitry. One brain area critical for this is the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which evaluates potential actions forward, helping us choose those that have the most value. A promising route to increasing motivation, then, is identifying which goal or set of goals are most critical to attend to first. So, aligning on an understanding of the “why” and prioritization are both critical for driving engagement toward achieving those goals.  Other factors come into play when setting great goals. One is autonomy. Michelle was on the right track to ask Eduardo to come up with his own ideas. Research shows that autonomy when setting goals results in greater effort, increased engagement, and greater commitment toward the goal. Another factor is alignment. Here, research shows that when work or organizational goals align with an individual’s sense of self and ideal “future self,” they are more highly motivating. This also works when we ensure our team goals align with organizational goals: Alignment ensures everyone is working in the same direction.  Finally, goals should be a stretch. This is where a manager can really shine. Research shows that the key is finding the sweet spot of challenge where the task is just beyond the individual’s current capabilities, and then guiding them toward this goal, promoting maximum cognitive growth. This realm of difficulty is called the Zone of Proximal Development, a very useful framework for developing others while achieving high performance goals. Again, while it’s a collaborative effort, it’s also highly personal: What’s challenging for one will not necessarily be the same for another. In other words, goals can be either unstimulating or too stimulating — to the point of anxiety. Research shows that personalized stretch goals are ideal because they combine the intrinsic drive of a challenge with a person’s individual skill set.  Once the “why” is established, the “how” comes into play. If an employee does not have the tools or skill set to reach the goal, they may “spin their wheels” and submit lower-quality work or become demoralized by setting goals that they don’t know how to accomplish. Planning and executing novel behaviors — like those required to reach new goals — is coordinated largely by the prefrontal cortex in communication with motor planning regions. Ensuring that Eduardo had the tools and skills to take the first steps toward his goals while being there to support continued learning and growth would have engaged these brain regions to help him make progress.  When designing these goals, it's useful to make sure they’re sticky, or easy to recall. One way to do this is to follow The FACT Model™ (fluency, amount, coherence, and time) to work within the limits of cognitive capacity. Focusing specifically on fluency (how easy it is to process the information) and coherence (does the new information connect to existing knowledge) can help us build goals that we can easily visualize, actually driving engagement of the occipital lobe, the brain region that responds to what our eyes see.  In essence, clarity in purpose, prioritization, and a structured and easy-to-visualize approach are the cornerstones of goal attainment.  ACTIVITY 1:  Goals for yourself:  Identify a stretch goal for yourself and the steps you’ll need to take to attain it. Share with your team, and ask them to identify and break down their own stretch goals.  ACTIVITY 2:  Goals for the team:  Identify a current team goal and describe both the “why” and “how.”  Actions to choose from:   * If I’m identifying goals for myself or my team, then I’ll keep them to three or fewer stretch goals, not an exhaustive list. * If I’m tempted to assign goals to my direct report, I’ll instead let them choose their own goals so they feel ownership. * If I ask my team to identify stretch goals for themselves, I’ll make sure they have the skills needed to make the first steps and will set a plan to develop their skills where needed.   Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle is having a one-on-one on Zoom with one of her direct reports, Eduardo, an experienced customer service representative, to set goals for the upcoming quarter. Michelle thought it would be a good idea to let Eduardo come up with his own ideas for goals so that he felt ownership of them — and it would save time in the meeting. But to help guide Eduardo, Michelle has shared a clear formula: Think of three goals that are challenging but achievable with her help, inspiring, and highly memorable. She also told him to build in smaller steps along the way. She gave Eduardo some examples from others so he got a sense of what great looks like.  When Eduardo shares his goals, Michelle thinks they seem too easy, like “business as usual” goals. She asks Eduardo which ones he thinks are strong and which need work. After some back and forth, they sign off on three high-quality goals and a set of clear next steps to reach those goals.  Two weeks later, without prompting, Eduardo shares that he’s made good progress on two of the goals and is thinking a lot about getting started on the third. “I still don’t know exactly how I’m going to achieve these goals, but they’re making me think differently,” he says.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In Skill 2: Set Great Goals, participants explore the art and science of effective goal-setting within the framework of mobilizing others. This skill focuses on crafting goals that not only challenge individuals but also align with their intrinsic motivations and the strategic objectives of the organization. Participants will explore the critical components of goal-setting: ensuring goals are inspiring, stretch the individual appropriately, and are memorable or "sticky" for easy recall and engagement.  The training emphasizes the "Choose Your Focus™" model, which guides individuals to understand the different levels of focus necessary for successful goal achievement, from the broad vision or "why" of a goal to the specific "how" of its execution. This model is instrumental in maintaining motivation and ensuring that goals lead to meaningful action and results.  Participants will learn how to personalize goal-setting conversations to cater to the unique motivations and strengths of each team member, thereby enhancing their ability to achieve stretch goals. The course introduces the neuroscience behind goal pursuit and motivation, offering insights into how goals can be structured to maximize engagement, foster a growth mindset, and promote resilience and adaptability in the face of change.  Through this skill, participants will become adept at setting goals that are not only aligned with organizational needs but also deeply resonate with individual aspirations, driving performance and fostering a culture of continuous growth and development. Theory Why set goals?  Goals have a number of benefits: they help people focus on what’s important to them and to live their values; they allow people to challenge themselves, often leading to learning and growth; and they create motivation, inspiring people to take action. Thanks to developments in neuroscience, we can help people to develop goals that are designed with the brain in mind, thus increasing their chances of success.  What are the elements of strong goals?  Inspiring  Goals should tap into someone’s emotions and motivation so they create a toward-state. A toward-state helps people stay motivated during goal pursuit. Another way to think about it: goals should have a human element, rather than being purely transactional or data-driven. Help people explore their personal values as a way to get clarity on what motivates them. Even better, help them find alignment between their personal values and organizational values.  Stretch  They are individualized to stretch the person just the right amount  Sticky  Easy to recall, memorable, short, punchy and precise.  Choose Your Focus™  The level of focus we are operating from can impact how successfully we complete a goal. That’s why, in conversations about goals, both parties should notice their level of thinking and decide what is most productive.  Vision – the WHY  The highest and the most abstract level of focus, this is where we look at the big picture, the meaning of what we do. Vision is neither detailed nor fixed. By focusing on the vision, a person is more likely to be in a “toward” state (facing a challenge), experiencing higher motivation and a sense of purpose. Thus, they tend to be more open to making new connections and more likely to have meaningful insights.  Planning – the general HOW  Once we know where we are heading, planning is about how we are going to get there. Planning is thinking about the processes, but not yet focusing on executing the specific steps. Focusing on planning further helps the brain maintain a “toward” state.  3 Detail – the specific HOW  This is where the action is taken. Detail is where people tend to naturally put all their energy. However, if we focus on the details without focusing on vision and planning first, it can shift us into an “away” state (avoiding a challenge) as a result of lacking a clear purpose.  What is the Choose Your Focus Model™?  There are five levels at which we can focus when solving problems, making decisions, and going about our work. The level of focus can determine whether we and the other people are in a toward or away state. The levels are Vision, Planning, Detail, Problem and Drama.  The top two levels, Vision (why do something) and Planning (what to do), foster a future orientation, enable us to adapt a solution-focused lens and increase creativity. It’s helpful to do this kind of thinking early on in an interaction or project to better frame up the rest of your thinking.  The bottom three levels are action oriented. The Detail (how to do it) level is useful for getting work done.  However, if we jump to detail without a clear vision and plan, we enter the level of Problem (things have gone wrong) and Drama (the emotional fallout), which are the main culprits that trigger the strong negative emotions that derail logical thinking.  1. Vision - the why  Vision is about our direction. It’s a broad, high-level, bird’s-eye view where we think about the why. This kind of thinking engages brain regions like the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), which is associated with processing intention, mental states, and a more abstract approach to our goals (Berkman & Rock 2014). Therefore, the why directly speaks to our motivation and it can feel intrinsically rewarding.  2. Planning - the what  Once we know the direction, planning is about what we do to get there. Planning is thinking about the process, not yet executing the specific steps. It ‘chunks’ ideas into smaller pieces, helping manage cognitive capacity. Problem focus limits creativity and leaves us cognitively and emotionally taxed. Research shows that the clearer our why, the better we are at effectively outlining the steps (Catagnus et al 2020).  3. Detail - the how  This is where we go into the weeds of how to tackle an issue specifically. The how directly speaks to the actions we perform to imagine an activity and break it down into steps. It engages the motor regions of the brain that govern action preparation and execution (Berkman 2018).  While Detail is where people naturally tend to put all their energy in because it feels like progress, it is also the gateway to stress (a threat state) unless we stay connected to the why.  4. Problem  Problem is the territory where things go wrong. It is past-oriented, emotionally tense, disempowering, and thus likely to put us in a threat state. Problem focus results in limiting our creativity and leaving us cognitively and emotionally taxed.  5. Drama  Drama is where all levels get blended together, creating an emotionally charged state. Drama is not productive. The more drama there is, the more threat we feel, resulting in impaired problem solving and decision making.  What is the science behind the Choose Your Focus model?  Whenever we face a decision, problem, or dilemma, or when we pursue a goal, we tend to shift our thinking back and forth between why we’re doing it (motivation) and how to do it (execution). This means that where we focus our attention can range from the most abstract and conceptual understanding of a task to its most nitty-gritty, detailed aspects. Noticing our level of thinking enables us to consciously choose where we allocate our energy. It is particularly important that the appropriate thinking be done in the right order and at the right moment. Research indicates that because different types of thinking (why and how, in particular) activate different neural networks (Berkman 2018), the level of focus we are operating on often determines whether or not we get the job done, both individually and in teams.  Goal representation  Goals can be thought of as existing within a hierarchy, in that smaller, concrete goals are embedded within larger, abstract goals. (Carver & Scheier, 1980). This concept, which has been around a long time, is supported by recent research. Neuroimaging studies of goal hierarchies indicate that the brain systems for thinking about “why” and “how” are entirely separate (Spunt, Falk, & Lieberman, 2010).  “Why” thinking recruits brain regions associated with intentions and mental state reasoning. It refers to the high-level, abstract, bird’s-eye-view approach that defines the vision of the goal. Therefore, the “why” directly speaks to our motivation for the goal. In contrast, the “how” of goal representation is linked to the motor learning system that is engaged in action preparation and object identification. Therefore, the “how” directly speaks to the actions we perform to accomplish the goal.  “How and why are more than separate thoughts — they’re entirely separate ways of thinking.”—Elliot Berkman, NLI Summit 2012.  Goal pursuit  There is evidence that the brain systems for thinking about “why” and “how” are mutually inhibitory (Fox, Snyder, Vincent, Corbetta, Van Essen, & Raichle, 2005; Spengler, von Cramon, & Brass, 2009). Given this, it makes sense to have separate and distinct conversations about the abstract and concrete aspects of goals.  Managers can help direct reports move up and down the goal hierarchy during goal pursuit. This is a useful way to address difficulties that arise, for example, a period of inaction, decreased motivation, or a loss of confidence.  For example: Imagine a direct report has set a goal to “be as organized as my mentor.” To increase motivation, you could help them move up the hierarchy by asking them to reconnect to why they want to be more organized. They may reply that being more organized will create more time to spend with their family, allowing them to be a better parent and partner. The “why” focus connects them to their vision and values, which are intrinsically motivating.  If the direct report is not practicing the goal to be more organized on a daily basis, it may help to move down the hierarchy by focusing on how they will achieve it. For example, they could set a small, concrete goal in the form of an if-then plan: “If I create a new document, then I will save it in the appropriate folder.” These closer, concrete goals form the habits that accumulate toward achieving the more distant, abstract goal.  Goal motivation  In order to achieve a goal, we must experience sustained motivation. This begins in the goal-setting process with how we frame the goal to best match our personal motivational preference. As a general rule, it is helpful to be in a “toward” or “reward” state during goal pursuit.  Approach-avoidance motivation theory (Gray, 1970) states that there are two systems for motivation: one that is sensitive to reward (the approach system) and another that is sensitive to punishment (the avoidance system). The impact on behavior was illustrated in a study where people who were more approach-motivated were more likely to floss after seeing messages that flossing promotes good breath, whereas people who were avoidance-motivated, were more likely to floss after seeing messages that not flossing causes bad breath (Mann, Sherman, & Updegraff, 2004).  The motivation we respond to most strongly is somewhat dependent on our inbuilt preferences. For example, salespeople are often highly motivated by wins (approach motivation), whereas people drawn to legal or compliance roles are often avoidance-motivated.  Our current situation can also impact what motivates us. For example, a person who has just experienced a heart attack may initially be more sensitive to preventing further ill health (avoidance motivation) than they are to living a long and active life (approach motivation). Several years out from the heart attack, and after a sustained effort to build healthy habits, the approach-motivation may become more powerful.  With this in mind, it can be useful to explore with people how to frame a goal. Do they want to reduce team conflict or create a more collaborative team environment? Improve their fitness to avoid ill health or to increase well-being and resilience? During goal pursuit, it might be necessary to reframe the goal from “avoidance” to “approach” in order to maintain a high level of motivation.  The purpose of goal setting  Goal setting remains central to growth and development. Goals help focus people on what is most important, which can strengthen motivation and increase productivity. They can also build alignment with business strategy, giving people a bigger vision to work towards (Berkman & Rock, 2014).  But all too often, we do not end up achieving our goals. Whether this is because we weren’t motivated, were unclear how to achieve it, or just got side-tracked, we can look to neuroscience to discover how to best set goals up for success.  Goals should be motivating  When setting a goal, the way you choose to phrase it can affect your likeliness of success. There are two perspectives you can take—essentially, “succeed” or “don’t fail.” These frames help tap into different motivation systems. Approach motivation frames a goal in terms of reward, and avoidance motivation frames a goal in terms of threat.  Goal hierarchies  Ideally, a goal does not only speak to what you will achieve, but also to why you want to achieve it (abstract values), and how you will achieve it (the concrete actions you’ll take). That is, a strong goal consists of a what, a why, and a how.  Closer, concrete goals are certainly easier to achieve. But abstract goals that tap into deeper meaning or personal values harness the power of intrinsic motivation. So how can we leverage the benefits of both concrete and abstract goals? Goal hierarchies are ways of embedding goals into a robust system that strengthen your motivation networks and increase the likeliness of success (Berkman & Rock, 2014).  Imagine you have set a quarterly goal to be more organized. To move up and down the hierarchy you could ask:  Why do you want to be more organized? It may help to increase your sense of self-efficacy, better support business objectives and have more time to spend with your family. This connects your higher, more abstract values, which are intrinsically motivating.  How is it that you will be more organized? Setting specific implementation intentions stimulates behavior change. For example, commit to the phrase “If I create a new document, then I will save it in the appropriate folder.” This connects your goal to the actions you will take in a certain context, which helps to build new habits. These closer, concrete goals accumulate towards ultimately achieving your more distant, abstract goals.  The important thing is to be able to move up and down the hierarchy in case you get stuck or need to act. That is, if you keep the levels linked together in your mind like a circuit, you reduce the odds of fumbling at low-level obstacles because you can reactivate your why and more clearly see the bigger picture. You also reduce the odds of inertia, because you can reactivate how to know what to do next.  Once you’ve set your goal to put yourself in a toward state, expand that goal into a goal hierarchy. This interconnected circuit benefits goal achievement in terms of getting past obstacles, staying flexible, and staying motivated. Application How do I have an effective goal-setting conversation?  At the beginning, you might be tempted to say: Let's get through this fast. We know these goals are going to change anyway. Just take last year's goals and just bump them by 5%. Just fill out this form and email it back to me.  Instead say: Thanks for making time to discuss goals that will be meaningful for you and important for the business.  Let’s take some time to explore your ideas for setting priorities to achieve overall strategic goals. This is a chance for us to press pause on your day-to-day deliverables and think about the bigger picture about setting your goals. Where would you like to start?  In the middle, you might be tempted to say:  Here's what I think your goals should be. We need to tie them to metrics. I think you are ready to take on some really challenging assignments. Here’s how I would do it. I think you need to focus on [x].  Instead say:  Thinking about each of our strategic pillars, what would you like to achieve that would be inspiring and meaningful to you? In addition to achieving results, does this goal provide enough of a challenge to help you grow and learn? How can you reword that to make it memorable?  Which behaviors will you need to focus on to achieve this goal?  At the end, you might be tempted to say: Now that we’re clear where you’re headed, you’re ready to go.Here’s some pitfalls to avoid based on my experience.Let me know if you run into any roadblocks.  Instead say: What milestones you would need to achieve along the way? How do you think you can break these steps down to make it even easier? How can I support you in accomplishing that first step? Let's check-in on your progress in (X) days/weeks/months.  Question: How do I balance individual employee needs with organizational needs in goal setting conversations?  Answer: To balance individual and organization needs, we need to ask more “thinking” questions and practice active listening to better understand employees’ motivations. Ask questions to expand an employee’s thinking to uncover their motivation and help them get creative about their next steps. To promote continuous engagement and growth, communicate transparently, encourage employees to identify next steps and check in regularly to support. In this way, it’s possible to satisfy both individual employee needs and the organizational needs.  What are some tips to set great goals?  Do less: Set safe, comfortable targets that don't challenge the person to leave their comfort zone or develop their skills.  Do more: Leverage the “Vision” level of the Choose Your Focus Model™ to establish goals that encourage the person to stretch, while remaining attainable and inspiring.  Do less: Design goals solely based on external expectations and objectives, without tapping into individual motivation.  Do more: Craft goals that are inspiring, connecting with the person’s individual intrinsic motivation, and also aligning to the team’s purpose, in line with the Vision segment of the Choose Your Focus Model™.  Do less: Leave goals at a high-level vision without actionable steps.  Do more: Help people break down inspiring and stretch goals into actionable steps, reflecting the Detail part of the Choose Your Focus Model™, to provide a clear path forward.  Do less: Ignore the dynamic nature of goals amidst changing contexts.  Do more: Regularly revisit goals, updating them to stay relevant and challenging, ensuring they align with the Vision in the Choose Your Focus Model™, and adapting the Plan and Details as needed.  Do less: Over-complicate goal setting with excessive detail that confuses the main objective.  Do more: Keep the essence of the goals simple yet powerful, making them “sticky,” while ensuring that the planning and detailing process underpins rather than overwhelms the vision.  Do less: Dictate goals, missing out on your direct report’s engagement and buy-in.  Do more: Involve the team in all aspects of goal setting — from Vision to Detail — ensuring a shared understanding and commitment to these memorable, stretch, and inspiring goals.  Do less: Establish individual goals in isolation, disconnected from the team's and organization's objectives.  Do more: Ensure individual goals are clearly linked to broader team and organizational goals, emphasizing how each contribution propels the collective vision forward, fostering a sense of shared purpose and alignment.  Do less: Assume you already know what motivates your direct reports based on past interactions, surface-level conversations, or by imposing your own preferences and motivations.  Do more: Engage in deep, meaningful conversations to truly understand your direct reports’ motivations, aspirations, and values, using this insight to tailor goals that ignite their passion and commitment.  Do less: Rely solely on annual goal-setting, which can become outdated or lose relevance as circumstances change.  Do more: Implement a quarterly goal-setting system that allows for agility and adaptation to new information or changing conditions, ensuring goals remain relevant, engaging, and aligned with current priorities.  By integrating these approaches, leaders can set goals that are not just attainable but also memorable, challenging, and connected to the team's purpose, utilizing the Choose Your Focus model to maintain balance between Vision, Planning, and Detail. These approaches make the goal-setting process dynamic, personalized, and intricately tied to the larger purpose of the team and organization. They emphasize the importance of continuous dialogue, understanding, and flexibility in aligning individual progress and motivation with collective achievements.  POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * I need to achieve team goals and organizational goals but my direct report has personal goals that do not align. How do I keep my direct report motivated while also aligning them to the larger vision? * How do I help a direct report set a goal that is personally motivating? * My high performing direct report wants career progression / promotion but that is not available in my team. I am concerned I will lose them. * My direct report is not ambitious. They have a young family and their priority is work-life balance. They have resisted my attempts to set stretch goals. * How do I make a goal memorable or sticky? * I need my underperforming team member to step up, but they are resisting stretch goal suggestions.  Blog posts Focus on outcomes  By focusing more on outcomes—meaning the productivity and performance of an employee— instead of where, when, and how the person is working, managers can foster stronger relationships, create cultures of trust, and reduce turnover. What’s more, management focused on outcomes is driven by building a habit of identifying what great performance looks like, which creates the results everyone wants. Managers get the outcomes they want by setting goals that are good for the employee as well as the organization.  But goal-setting is a delicate balancing act. Competing goals or goals with competing priorities, for instance, can leave employees unclear on how to proceed. Not being provided certainty creates a heavy cognitive tax that can potentially lead to psychological costs when employees experience brain struggle associated with goal conflict. Indeed, new research indicates that if forced to prioritize conflicting goals, individuals need certainty on which goal is more important so they can act.  In addition, goals with a subjective measurement, like an improvement in attitude or initiative—adjustments that are imperative in today’s work environment—are often difficult to measure and discuss.  To understand how to best set goals, we explored the science of what happens in the brain when you aim for a new target. Getting this right can help managers maximize the ability to build strong hybrid cultures.  Let’s start with the science  The prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain that requires optimal conditions for processing and is responsible for complex problem solving and learning new things—is also the part that tracks the value of actions. This means that when we set goals, our brains are evaluating the importance of each goal before and during goal-directed behaviors to determine which ones take priority. When faced with multiple goals, the one with higher value will be prioritized. For example, an employee might have a 12-item task list from their manager and other leaders in the organization. If one of those items is for the CEO directly, that one may weigh more in the employee’s mind based on perceived recognition—regardless of the priorities of other tasks.  The value of goals can vary according to personal desire. But unless organizational goals match intrinsic goals, those goals will be competing for your employee’s precious and often finicky brain power.  What to think about when setting goals  Setting goals works best when managers create goals with four brain-friendly aspects in mind:  Make goals easy to recall: One of our great joys at NLI is creating “sticky” ways of thinking about the brain and work. Sticky in this case is akin to Facebook memes that you remember years later; it sticks in your brain, and you access it regularly. To make goals sticky, they must be simple and easily retrievable—such as one of our own goals at NLI, “think tomorrow, act today.” When they’re sticky, there’s an increased likelihood that we’ll accomplish them. Sticky, as Microsoft discovered, takes less cognitive effort to recall. What we can easily retrieve creates unconscious priming, conscious self-calibration, and continuous sharing. These three non-obvious benefits of sticky goals can lead to habit formation and, ultimately, behavior change.  Strive for goals to stretch:  Goals at the end of our reach, or slightly beyond, are more impactful than low-hanging fruit, according to an 11-year study on goal-setting, which found: “In 90% of the studies, specific and challenging goals led to higher performance than easy goals, “do your best” goals, or no goals. Goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development. Goal setting is most likely to improve task performance when the goals are specific and sufficiently challenging.” The goal of a stretch assignment should be to shift both individual and organizational thinking and to underscore the notion that if you work hard at challenging goals, appropriate rewards will follow. A word of caution, though, on stretch goals: some research has linked them to cheating and unethical behavior, because employees see them as a quick path to get ahead and adopt a “do whatever it takes” mentality. Given the resource limitations of many organizations dealing with “The Great Resignation,” it can be difficult to take on stretch challenges without “real work” suffering. Leaders need to identify stretch projects as career opportunities, and then fulfill incentives if the assignment is done well. Unsurprisingly, most work elements improve with the right incentives, and it can be detrimental to culture and morale to stretch someone and then fail to deliver on promised incentives.  Keep goals streamlined:  While you want goals to be challenging, that doesn’t mean they have to be complicated. Think about looking for something in an over-crowded junk drawer. When there is too much clutter, it becomes difficult to retrieve anything quickly. Our brains have limits, so minimizing the amount of information people need to process at any given time will maximize their attention to the tasks that matter. An employee should consistently be focused on two to three key goals relevant to both their career development and the growth of the business. You can test the ease of recall by opening every meeting by walking through the core goals. If an employee can’t remember all the goals you’re tracking, that’s an indicator it’s too many.  Model what goals should look like:  Managers want to achieve greatness, so goals should provide clarity on what ‘great’ looks like. This can be a challenging type of goal-setting, though, because managers often don’t know what great looks like. There are some goals where “great” may be easy to quantify, such as improving cost-saving measures over time, but others as we mentioned above, like attitude adjustments, which are difficult to measure. Managers can start by modeling what great can look like to their teams.  One approach is for managers to role model a growth mindset—the belief that skills can be improved over time, rather than set from birth. With a growth mindset you believe you can get better, and self-efficacy is a factor in goal achievement. In this way, “great” means “consistent improvement” which helps frame the concept of goal setting as an evolution. That mindset is particularly important because organizational goals change with market, strategy adjustments, new leaders, product pivots, and more. Employees need to adopt a growth mindset because even their most dearly-held goals might have to change. That’s why it’s helpful to establish “have to” goals versus “want to” goals. Self-determined choice has an impact on goal performance, so if you want your people to achieve great things, make sure they have a say in determining what great looks like.  The way goals are discussed also matters. Projecting your goals in a team environment can unconsciously generate competition among people with shared goals. This means that goal-setting is not an all-hands agenda item, or a team meeting agenda item. These discussions are best at the one-on-one, manager-employee level to improve team functioning while still driving individual growth.  The bottom line  Goal setting is an absolute requirement for effective work and can be brain-friendly, or not. Choose great goals together, make them sticky, limit them to a few, and stretch lightly. With the power of neuroscience, get the outcomes you—and your employees—want. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Employees may struggle to set goals that not only fulfill their personal ambitions but also align with the broader objectives of the organization. This misalignment can lead to reduced engagement and productivity.  **Solution 1:** Facilitate conversations that help employees identify how their personal values and motivations intersect with the company's vision and strategy. Use the "Choose Your Focus™" model to guide them in framing their goals at different levels, from vision to detailed actions, ensuring both personal and organizational alignment.  **Problem 2:** Setting goals that are too ambitious can lead to frustration and demotivation, while too easy goals may not lead to significant personal or professional growth.  **Solution 2:** Encourage employees to set "Stretch" goals that are challenging yet realistic, tapping into their intrinsic motivation and ensuring the goals are "Sticky" for easy recall and engagement. Provide guidance on breaking down these stretch goals into more manageable tasks to promote a sense of progress and accomplishment.  **Problem 3:** Employees often lose momentum after the initial excitement of setting a goal, especially when faced with obstacles or changing circumstances.  **Solution 3:** Regularly revisit and adjust goals as necessary to reflect new learnings or shifts in the business environment. Utilize the "Vision" and "Planning" aspects of the Choose Your Focus™ model to keep the goals relevant and motivating, ensuring employees can see the larger purpose behind their daily tasks and adapt their approach as needed. FAQS  * How can I ensure my goals align with both my personal ambitions and the organization's strategic objectives? * What strategies can I use to make my goals both inspiring and realistically achievable? * How can the "Choose Your Focus™" model help me in setting and achieving my goals? * In what ways can I keep myself motivated and on track towards achieving my goals, especially when facing obstacles or changes? * How can I effectively balance the need for stretch goals with the risk of setting goals that are too ambitious and potentially unattainable? | |
| Habit 2: Set the right courseSkill 3: Delegate and let go (SCARF: status, autonomy, certainty) [Michelle’s story]  It’s Tuesday morning, and Michelle is frustrated. She met with her team of field representatives a few weeks ago and outlined, at a high level, how she wanted them to interact with customers differently. She told them they need to create a better customer experience by having better conversations and making sure they felt heard, figuring they’d know what she was talking about. Yet, weeks later, nothing seems to have changed. She continues to get complaints of unhappy customers. Michelle is at a loss what to do. She decides she’ll need to do more of the work herself and watch everyone more closely, accompanying them on their site visits and taking notes on how they’re interacting with customers. But so far, she’s noticed her team members are just going through the motions, not making efforts to truly connect with customers in the way Michelle envisioned. She’s not sure whether to take on all of the customer calls herself or just forget about it and let them do what they want, despite the poor reviews.  Research  One of the toughest challenges of becoming a manager is taking on a whole new set of responsibilities, more than you can take on yourself, and deciding how to get your direct reports to help you complete these tasks, all while keeping in mind their skills need to be developed. So, when you plan your management strategies, how you delegate the work and get your direct reports to complete that work is a critical challenge. Furthermore, when people don’t do what you expect of them, it creates a status threat for you as the manager — and to balance out this threat, we generally try one of three strategies, which in reality are management traps. We can think about these through the lens of The SCARF® Model, which defines the five psychological dimensions that can trigger either a threat or reward, causing us to avoid or engage.  Trap 1: Micromanaging  One of the most common ways managers feel better is to increase their own certainty, by wanting to know everything that’s happening, and their autonomy, by wanting to make each and every decision. This is also known as micromanaging. The trouble with micromanaging is that while it increases SCARF® reward signals for the manager, it decreases the employee’s sense of autonomy, as well as status, fairness, and maybe even relatedness. This is critical because our sense of threat impacts our behavior more strongly than our sense of reward. While some people who are totally new to a role might crave certainty and appreciate overly detailed directions, generally, it creates strong threats in all other domains. Micromanaging also erodes trust between managers and their team, as it signals a lack of confidence in employees' abilities, ultimately stifling their autonomy and growth. This practice fosters dependence on the manager, hindering employees' problem-solving skills and creativity. Simultaneously, it burdens managers, leading to burnout from the exhaustive need to oversee every detail.  ACTIVITY 1:   1. What does it feel like when someone gives an overly detailed explanation about a task you already understand?   (Slider, from “I hate it” to “I love it”)   1. If you've micromanaged before, what was your reason for doing so?   Word cloud  Trap 2: Managing by abdication  Not everyone micromanages. In fact, some managers skew in a completely opposite direction by letting people do whatever they want, which can maximize their team’s autonomy but doesn’t provide much certainty about the objective or what good looks like. Abdication allows the manager to avoid dealing with people’s reactions from being told what to do. Managers can also more easily blame the employees for their poor performance.  ACTIVITY 2:   1. How do you feel when you’re asked to do something with minimal guidance?   Wordcloud   1. How confident do you feel in knowing how much guidance to give?   Slider from “really none at all” to “I know exactly how much to give”)  Trap 3: ‘I’ll just do it myself’  The third trap, which is particularly common among new managers, is doing their team’s work for them. Perhaps you think it’ll take less time to do the task yourself than explain it in detail to someone. Or, you watch a team member perform a task and notice they take a different, less effective approach. The temptation to do all the work yourself can result from one of our many cognitive biases, or mental shortcuts. It can be the result of an experience bias, where we act or want things done based on what we’ve done in the past. On the other hand, it could result from the avoidance of loss or failure, known as safety bias. Michelle may have also suffered from the illusion of transparency, a bias where people overestimate the degree to which their thoughts or beliefs are understood by others. This bias could have resulted in her believing her team understood what she wanted from them without providing a sufficiently detailed explanation. However, if you mitigate these biases and enable your team to follow their own paths while providing clear (but not overly detailed) instructions, they’re likely to choose the correct path in a moment of insight, motivating them to move forward. Sometimes, you have to remind yourself that your employee’s engagement is just as important as doing a task “correctly” and will enable better performance over the long term.  ACTIVITY 3:   1. How do you feel when someone steps in and takes over a task you were completing yourself?   Wordcloud   1. How often do you feel the need to step in and take over a task that one of your direct reports was doing?   Slider?  How to delegate well  The good news is there are three brain-friendly delegation strategies that new managers can learn to set their team up for success:   1. Show what great looks like   One of the best ways to delegate is by using positive deviance, or having your team study and learn from people who are really good at a task and noting specific things they do to be successful. How does a successful salesperson, for example, schedule their time? How do they pitch, and when and how do they follow up? Or take a nurse: How do they greet a new patient? What do they say to a patient in distress? Studying the methods of top performers seems obvious but is an often overlooked tactic. In addition to sharing best practices, showing what great looks like also helps set expectations because it gives people a sense of certainty and may provide some autonomy if you provide options in how they can become great. For example, if you’re asking someone to code a web page, showing what great looks like may include an explanation of what the code is supposed to do, how complex it should be, examples of other high-quality coding, and a clear deadline. Then, let the coder work out how to get there.   1. Make if-then plans   The gold standard for increasing the odds that people will successfully execute a task is something we call an if-then plan, or an implementation intention. Research shows adding these plans increases the likelihood of an intention happening by 200%–400%, depending on the situation. That’s because an if-then plan allows a situation and an action to become linked in our minds. We’re able to visualize the circumstance and the ensuing action, making it easier to develop a habit: If (X) situation occurs, then you will take (Y) action. For example, if you find yourself planning to complete a task yourself, then you’ll pause and consider if someone else can do it. Or, if you find yourself starting to blame a team member for a mistake, then you’ll ask yourself how you may have contributed.  ACTIVITY 4  Turn these general intentions into if-then plans.  I want to exercise more.  I want to manage my emotions better.  I want to have more insights.   1. Learn to let go   Even on our best days, it can be difficult to watch people do things differently than you would or to give up a task you enjoyed doing before you became a manager. Even identical twins have different neural wiring and approach most tasks individually. This means that no two people approach even simple tasks the same way. Mitigating the cognitive biases that cause you to step in instead of letting go will help you delegate better. Enabling your direct reports to approach a task in the way they choose and asking for others’ input along the way are great ways to mitigate the tendencies to micromanage or just take over.  Activities to choose from:   * If I’m tempted to complete a task myself, then I’ll ask if anyone else could do it. * If I’m tempted to micromanage, then I’ll show my employees an example of what great looks like and let them work out how to get there. * If I want my team to change how they do things, I’ll help them develop if-then plans.   Michelle’s story take two  On Tuesday morning, Michelle holds a meeting with field representatives. She apologizes for not being clear a few weeks ago when she told them they need to interact with customers differently. Michelle announces that she’ll accompany each of them on a few customer visits, with Michelle role modeling what she means. Then, she asks the team for other ideas on behaviors they can work on to make customers feel truly listened to. The team comes up with a number of suggestions and turns them into if-then plans.  The meeting wraps up with the team feeling confident. Their sense of certainty went up without their autonomy falling, and the team has a shared goal (providing customers with a better overall experience), which increases their sense of relatedness. Within days, Michelle sees the new if-then plans being used, and customers react by leaving much better reviews.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In Skill 3: Delegate and Let Go, participants are guided to understand the crucial balance between maintaining control and empowering their teams through effective delegation. This skill focuses on overcoming common barriers to delegation by employing strategic "if-then" planning, a method that encourages habit formation conducive to delegating tasks more effectively.  The core of this skill lies in understanding and leveraging the SCARF model—specifically, the domains of status, autonomy, and certainty—to both improve one's own management practices and enhance team performance. Participants will learn how to identify situations where delegation is beneficial, how to set clear, actionable plans for themselves and their team members, and how to cultivate a sense of autonomy and trust within their teams.  Through practical application, you'll discover how to formulate "if-then" plans that are succinct and specific, thereby reducing cognitive load and making these plans easy to recall and act upon. These plans are designed to trigger desirable behaviors automatically, turning conscious efforts into effortless habits.  This skill emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where team members feel empowered to take ownership of their tasks, while leaders learn to step back and focus on strategic oversight. Participants will be equipped with the tools to effectively delegate and let go, enhancing team autonomy, ensuring certainty in outcomes, and ultimately, driving higher performance and satisfaction across the board. Theory If-then plans  The brain has a braking system that can override habitual action — instead of exercising our free will, we can exercise our “free won’t.” The ventrolateral prefrontal cortex is responsible for this veto power, but this area of the brain is highly resource intensive and tires easily. This explains why we’re less vigilant resisting temptation when we’re not fully refreshed and alert. One of the keys to lasting behavior change is to use strategies that don’t rely on our exhaustible “free won’t.” If-then plans help us do exactly that — they cue our minds to behave in a certain way in a specific situation. They link the situation and action, making us more likely to seize the opportunity to strengthen our new habits when they arise.  To create an if-then plan:   1. Identify the outcome you want. 2. List several ideas for behaviors that could achieve that outcome. 3. Choose the most actionable behavior. 4. Identify a situation that will activate the behavior. 5. Write your if-then statement.   The most effective if-then plans are both succinct and specific. This creates a lower cognitive load, making them easy to recall when they are needed. The format is IF (or WHEN) Situation X occurs, THEN I will perform Behaviour Y.  Creating new habits is resource hungry. The PFC has to expend a lot of effort to override existing habits (hardwiring) and regulate impulses. If a person is stressed, distracted, or even hungry, this control can fail.  If-then plans help us stick with new behaviors even when the PFC is depleted, and this repetition helps turn behaviors that require effort into habits that don't require conscious thought. If-then plans use triggers to activate actions so we can quickly build a new habit formation loop. If (or when) Situation X occurs, then I will do Y  For example, If I want to give advice during a coaching conversation, then I will pause and ask a question about their thinking. If-then plans act like cues in our minds to behave in a certain way in a specific situation. Sometimes they are referred to as ‘instant habits’. The key to an effective if-then plan is that it is succinct and specific, so it is easy to recall under pressure. Application What is an example if-then plan to build the habit “delegate and let go”?   * If I notice myself micromanaging others on a project, then I will work with them to find the right level of autonomy. * When a team member asks me to solve their problem, then I will coach them by asking, “How would you solve that problem?”   What are some tips to delegate and let go?  Do less: Delegate tasks without clear contingency plans, leaving too much to improvisation.  Do more: Encourage the creation of if-then plans when delegating, equipping your team with predefined responses to potential obstacles, fostering both proactivity and preparedness.  Do less: Micromanage, providing excessive detail that stifles creativity and autonomy.  Do more: Offer enough detail to maintain certainty about overall expectations and outcomes, while granting autonomy in the methods used to achieve those outcomes, balancing guidance with freedom.  Do less: Assume a task is understood and will be executed correctly without follow-up.  Do more: Establish clear milestones and check-in points post-delegation to ensure understanding, alignment, and to offer support without descending into micromanagement.  Do less: Delegate only mundane, low-impact tasks, which can demotivate and signal a lack of trust.  Do more: Mix in high-value, challenging tasks with routine delegation to signal trust and invest in team development.  Do less: Overload a few perceived high-performers with delegated tasks, risking burnout and imbalance.  Do more: Distribute tasks thoughtfully among the team, considering individual development goals and current workload, ensuring fair and effective allocation.  Do less: Leave ambiguity in expected outcomes and timelines when delegating tasks.  Do more: Clarify expectations and deadlines at the outset, maintaining open lines of communication for any clarifications or adjustments needed, ensuring both parties are aligned.  Do less: Delegate tasks and then completely disengage, leaving team members without the necessary support or guidance.  Do more: Maintain a supportive oversight after delegation, ensuring team members have access to the resources and guidance needed to succeed while fostering their independence and problem-solving skills.  Do less: Reclaim tasks you’ve delegated at the first sign of trouble, reinforcing the belief that it’s quicker to do things yourself.  Do more: Resist the urge to take back tasks, encouraging problem-solving and growth among your team. Provide coaching when challenges arise, reinforcing the learning opportunity and reinforcing your commitment to their development.  Do less: Hold onto tasks due to a belief that no one else can do them to your standard, creating bottlenecks and stymying team development.  Do more: Consciously identify tasks for delegation that contribute to team learning and growth. Recognize the value in others taking on new challenges, even if initial attempts don't meet your exacting standards, appreciating the long-term benefits of their development.  Do less: Ignore the impacts of your delegation style on team morale and development.  Do more: Continually assess and adapt your delegation approach based on individual and team feedback, recognizing that effective delegation is a dynamic, two-way learning process.  Do less: View delegation as merely a tool for offloading your workload.  Do more: Approach delegation as a strategic development tool, selecting tasks for delegation that align with individual growth paths and the team's strategic objectives.  Do less: Neglect to communicate the bigger picture behind delegated tasks, reducing their perceived value.  Do more: Always contextualize delegated tasks within the larger team and organizational goals, enhancing motivation and engagement by showing each team member how their contribution fits into the broader vision.  By adopting these practices, leaders can delegate effectively, maximizing team efficiency and development, while nurturing an environment of trust and empowerment. This balanced approach enables movement toward collective objectives with agility and resilience.  POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS   * I have trouble delegating, I don’t trust others to do things correctly. How can I get better at it? * I have too much on my plate and no-one to delegate to. * I feel uncomfortable delegating tasks, everyone is so busy already. What should I do?  Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Leaders often hesitate to delegate tasks due to a fear that their own role and significance within the team or organization might be perceived as diminished. This concern can prevent the effective distribution of responsibilities, potentially leading to burnout and reduced team efficiency.  **Solution 1:** Encourage leaders to view delegation as an opportunity to enhance their leadership status by developing their team's capabilities. Highlight the value of leadership that fosters growth and autonomy among team members, and provide examples of how successful delegation has led to recognition and career advancement.  **Problem 2:** A key barrier to effective delegation is a leader's lack of trust in their team's ability to perform tasks to the expected standard. This mistrust can lead to micromanagement, which undermines team autonomy and discourages innovation and growth.  **Solution 2:** Build trust through activities that allow leaders to observe and acknowledge their team members' skills and competencies. Introduce if-then plans for leaders to use when they feel inclined to micromanage, such as stepping back and scheduling constructive feedback sessions instead.  **Problem 3:** After tasks have been delegated, leaders may find it challenging to keep team members motivated and engaged, especially as the initial excitement of new responsibilities fades or when tasks become monotonous.  **Solution 3:** Encourage regular check-ins that focus on support, recognition of achievements, and discussions about the broader impact of the team's work. Apply the SCARF model to tailor interactions, ensuring that team members feel recognized, understand their role and expectations clearly, and are empowered to make decisions, thereby maintaining engagement and motivation. FAQS  * How can I overcome my fear of losing significance within my team by delegating tasks? * What strategies can I use to build trust in my team's abilities and reduce my tendency to micromanage? * How do I create effective if-then plans to support the habit of delegation and letting go? * In what ways can I use the SCARF model to enhance team members' motivation and engagement after delegating tasks? * What are some best practices for regular check-ins with team members to ensure they remain motivated and understand their contributions to the broader goals? | |
| Habit 3: Inspire great workSkill 1: Make feedback the norm (feedback conversations, SCARF) (M) Chayton Government (Filipino) 2, 9, 13, 16 Finance  Daiyu’s story  We’re back with Daiyu, a newly promoted nurse manager, trying to increase the patient success rate from adopting a low rate when she moved into this position.  Daiyu (during a performance check-in with Ben, one of her floor nurses): Hi, Ben. How’s it going?  Ben: Good. How are you?  Daiyu: I’m fine. Listen, you’re doing a great job overall, but I wanted to give you some feedback on your communication style. Sometimes, when I ask you a straightforward question about a patient, you don’t answer right away. You make a joke or go off on a tangent about your day. It wastes valuable time, and I’d like you to be more mindful of that in the future.  Ben: Um, okay, sorry about that. I’ll do better in the future.  Daiyu: Okay, great. Now, do you have any feedback for me as a manager or is everything going well?  Ben (hesitates): Things are going pretty well, I guess.  Daiyu: Alright, then. Great talk!  ACTIVITY 1:  What does it feel like when someone says, “I want to give you some feedback.”  Wordcloud  ACTIVITY 2:  What does it feel like when you have to give someone feedback?  Wordcloud  Research  While we know that feedback is critical for improvement, the reality is that it can feel like a threat to both the giver and receiver. Our brains are wired to sense the presence of potential threats in our environment. When the limbic brain region is engaged, we’re highly alert and cognitively impacted in a way that makes us less collaborative and creative. Being judged or rejected by another is one of those perceived threats, and this can occur on both sides of the conversation: as the receiver or giver of feedback. In fact, our research demonstrated that giving feedback is more stressful than receiving it, as measured through physiological stress markers. However, we also found that when individuals ask for feedback first, this roughly halves the stress levels for both sides and leads to more constructive feedback.  The reason giving feedback is stressful, and why asking for feedback is the solution, lies in the five domains of psychological needs, or The SCARF® Model. Going into a feedback conversation without asking for feedback first can cause the receiver to feel threatened. For example, they could feel threatened by a lack of certainty about the nature of the feedback or a lack of autonomy by being unable to choose when or what to get feedback on. On the side of the feedback giver, having this conversation can trigger a threat to their relatedness since it could cause the other to get upset at them and a threat to their sense of status if the other person disagrees with their feedback.  However, enabling someone to ask for feedback provides a set of SCARF® rewards on both sides of the conversation. First, the asker will feel a sense of autonomy for choosing to ask for feedback and certainty when asking for specific feedback. Second, the giver will feel a sense of reward in the domains of status and relatedness for being chosen to provide feedback.  ACTIVITY 3:  How often do you ask your team for feedback on the way you manage, such as how you structure meetings or how you provide instruction?  Sliding scale or multiple choice  ACTIVITY 4:  How often do you give unsolicited feedback to your direct reports?  Sliding scale / multiple choice?  3 tips on how to ask for feedback:   * Ask what you do well to build on. * Ask what you might do differently in the future. * Ask multiple people and be as specific as you can.   Activities to choose from:   * If I haven't been asked to give feedback from my team in a while, then I'll explicitly encourage them to ask for feedback and reinforce the benefits of receiving feedback from multiple sources. * If I ask for feedback, I’ll be specific about what I want feedback on and ask what I do well in addition to what I might do differently. * If I want feedback, I’ll ask multiple people.   Daiyu’s story, take two:  Daiyu (during a performance check-in with Ben, one of her floor nurses): Hi, Ben. How’s it going?  Ben: Good. How are you?  Daiyu: I’m fine. Listen, I’ve been wanting to ask you for some feedback. Lately, I’ve been working on connecting better with the team. Have you noticed anything I do well or anything I need to improve?  Ben (thinks for a minute): You take our job very seriously, which I respect. But I feel like you don’t often take the time to ask about how we nurses are doing. Our job is so heavy sometimes I feel the need to lighten the mood by joking around a bit, but you don’t seem to appreciate that. I know we always need to put patients first, but when we’re not in a hurry, I think some personal interaction and humor would increase the relatedness of our team.  Daiyu: That’s really helpful! I know I can be all business sometimes. I’ll try to lighten up a bit, for all of our sakes.  After Ben leaves her office, Daiyu reflects that asking for feedback wasn’t as painful as she thought it would be. And Ben raised some good points about building team relatedness and having fun while still meeting patient needs.  For Ben’s part, he leaves Daiyu’s office feeling that his perspective was heard, and he witnessed great role modeling of what it looks like to ask for feedback. He runs into a fellow nurse, Diane, at the nurse’s station.  Ben: Hey, Diane. Do you have a minute? I’m trying to get better at patient charting. Have you noticed things I’m doing well? And what about things I could be doing differently?  **NILES content:** High-level overview Skill 1: Make Feedback the Norm equips participants with strategies to transform feedback into a regular, constructive part of their work culture. It emphasizes the importance of actively seeking feedback to enhance personal and organizational growth. Through this skill, individuals learn to ask for feedback effectively, fostering an environment where feedback is not only accepted but also valued. Participants will discover how to minimize the discomfort typically associated with receiving feedback by framing it as a tool for learning and improvement. By promoting a feedback-friendly culture, this skill aims to increase employee engagement, clarify roles, motivate career development, and boost organizational efficiency. Participants are encouraged to ask for feedback explicitly, broadly, and often, to ensure continuous growth and development. Theory Why is feedback so important?  Research shows that achieving goals can be greatly aided by frequent, targeted feedback. The more information people have about the quality of their work, the more likely they are to have a clear understanding of how to improve. It is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve that clarity without the perspectives of others.  Because of our many unconscious cognitive biases, a person’s own point of view is inherently subjective and thus limited by our own perspective. By seeing one’s work from another point of view, through feedback, we are better equipped to see a more complete picture.  Ask for feedback  One of the most effective ways to reduce the threat inherent in receiving feedback is simply to ask for it directly, instead of waiting for others to offer it up.  Why is asking for feedback less threatening, and therefore more effective?   * Asking for feedback can help to maintain your sense of status, because it both allows you to show self-awareness and willingness to learn, and it also sends positive status signal to the other person whose opinion we ask for. * Asking for feedback can increase your sense of certainty by getting both a clearer sense of your own performance and exactly the information you need to improve. * Asking for feedback increases your sense of control or autonomy because the choice to receive feedback is yours.   Create a culture of feedback  Research suggests that there are many benefits to organizations that create a feedback-friendly culture where there is an emphasis on the importance of feedback, support for giving and using feedback, and an effort to ensure high-quality feedback. The benefits include not only a greater utilization of feedback but also higher employee engagement, greater commitment, decreased absenteeism, enhanced role clarity and career motivation, and increases in organizational efficiency.  One way to motivate and support employees is to provide regular, specific feedback about what they are doing well. Positive feedback creates a reward state, and is therefore a signal to the brain to do more of something. Alongside this, provide employees with opportunities to give themselves feedback for improvement by asking what they learned and what they might do differently next time. And finally, create a “feedback-friendly” organizational culture by role-modelling asking for feedback yourself. This makes it safer for everyone to give and receive feedback.  Three keys to asking for feedback  Asking for feedback from colleagues expands your understanding of your personal impact beyond your own point of view. In addition, asking—rather than waiting for feedback—allows you three specific advantages:   * You can ask explicitly, in order to ensure you receive the feedback you need most. * You can ask broadly, in order to mitigate the biases present in any one person’s point of view. * And you can ask often, in order to get the frequent input that will allow you to grow faster and with greater agility.   Ask explicitly  Asking explicitly about the aspect of your work you would like someone’s feedback on helps you to get exactly the information you need to improve, rather than leaving it up to the other person to interpret (or misinterpret) your development needs. Making a specific, direct request also increases your sense of self-control, autonomy, and ownership over the situation. This minimizes threat and orients your brain towards learning from the information, rather than getting defensive. One of the most effective ways to ask for feedback explicitly is to ask both for what to build on (e.g., what you are already doing that is working well) and where to refocus.  Ask broadly  Asking for feedback from many colleagues at different levels within the organization results in your gaining a diverse set of perspectives. Everyone has a perspective they can share that may hold something of value for you. In addition, asking broadly helps mitigate your own unconscious biases, as well as the biases of the feedback givers. It also offers you a more complete sense of your own performance, since it’s likely that some people work with you in different contexts, and therefore see different aspects of the work you do. Getting diverse perspectives helps you see the whole picture.  Ask often  Asking often for feedback enables the feedback giver to provide a more timely and specific perspective, rather than having to reflect upon and remember over long stretches of time. This would result in a less precise view of behavior due to both unconscious bias and lapses in memory. It’s easier to continuously improve and monitor your progress with a more current (and accurate) understanding of the behaviors you want to change or build on. By asking often you can build the habit of asking for viewpoints. This can become a normal, everyday part of the work you do.  Knowing (explicitly) what to build on  Most people assume, at least implicitly, that feedback is about pointing out mistakes. In fact, the brain itself has dedicated neural mechanisms for monitoring our performance for errors. Not only are we wired to detect and correct errors in our own behavior, we are also wired to do so for others’ behavior. As a result, an equally important form of feedback — feedback about what someone is doing well — is often neglected. Feedback about what’s working — what we should build on — isn’t simply a matter of providing acknowledgment. It also provides essential guidance as to which behaviors are worth repeating, or even increasing. Without a sense of their positive impact, employees are left with little reason to take effective actions.  Asking for feedback from your colleagues explicitly, broadly, and often provides a variety of benefits. It’s important to ensure that the point of view shared with you (or that you share with someone else) is something that can really be used—that is it contains the right kind of information and is expressed in the right way.  Knowing (explicitly) where to refocus  We tend to think that we hate getting feedback, especially negative feedback. What we often forget, though, that our brain uses feedback - the input and data points that offer valuable information - to help us learn, correct mistakes, and change behavior. The feedback we dislike receiving is often unrequested negative feedback. Unrequested feedback can create a strong threat response, interfering with our ability to focus on, process, and use the input we receive. Therefore asking for where to refocus—where new behaviors and strategies might be needed—is critical for ongoing improvement.  What happens in the brain when feedback “works”  Neuroscientists and psychologists have spent decades investigating the ideal conditions for receiving and processing information about performance. The three most critical steps for successfully sharing feedback in order to create behavior change are: Frame; Contrast; Commit.  Step 1: Frame  Research suggests that the most effective mindset for learning and performance is a growth mindset, characterized by both (1) the belief that improvement is possible and (2) commitment to the goal of growth and development. When you adopt a growth mindset, you prime your brain to be open to new perspectives and receive performance input as an opportunity to improve, rather than as a judgment or criticism. In fact, studies show that people with a growth mindset literally process feedback differently in the brain, with relatively less activity in the brain regions responsible for negative emotion and more activity in the brain regions responsible for long-term memory encoding.  2 Step 2: Contrast  Feedback conversations often fail because they focus exclusively on either current behavior (what you are doing wrong) or desired behavior (what great looks like). However, research on motivational processes shows that in order for the desired change in behavior to occur, people need to contrast current behavior with desired behavior to understand the gap between the two. It is the difference, or discrepancy, between these two states that engages the brain system that drives attention, effort, and persistence in pursuit of a goal.  3 Step 3: Commit  It’s very difficult to make multiple major behavioral changes at the same time, because making a change uses up significant self-regulatory resources — like attention, willpower, and effort — and these resources are not limitless and need to be regularly replenished. Without enough energy in the tank, we can’t resist temptation, and we succumb to old patterns of behavior. To facilitate the creation of a new habit, research shows that people can significantly increase their chances of success by taking a moment to link what they want to achieve to when, where, and how they intend to achieve it. IF I am in situation X, THEN I will do Y. This is called an if-then plan, or implementation intention. People who make if-then plans are up to four times more likely to achieve their goal or change their behavior than those who do not. This is because the planners are more likely to notice opportunities to engage in the needed behavior.  REFERENCES:  Mangels, J. A., Butterfield, B., Lamb, J., Good, C., & Dweck, C. S. (2006). Why do beliefs about intelligence influence learning success? A social cognitive neuroscience model. Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience, 1(2), 75-86.  Cheema, A., & Bagchi, R. (2011). The effect of goal visualization on goal pursuit: Implications for consumers and managers. Journal of Marketing, 75(2), 109-123. Penner, L. A., Dovidio, J. F., Piliavin, J. A., & Schroeder, D. A. (2005). Prosocial behavior: Multilevel perspectives. Annual Review of Psychology, 56, 365-392.  Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 38, 69-119.  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(2008). SCARF®: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. The NeuroLeadership Journal, 1, 44-52. Willyerd, K., & Mistick, B. (2015, August 14). How to get feedback when no one is volunteering it. Harvard Business Review.  How SCARF explains the discomfort of feedback  Status  When receiving feedback for improvement we may feel our status is being attacked – we might feel judged and undervalued. When we see someone as having equal or greater status than us, we can experience status threats when giving feedback/We may wonder if we have the right to give it.  Certainty  Sometimes when receiving feedback we sense a hidden agenda, or that the person is holding something back – this can create a certainty threat. Our brains tend to interpret any ambiguity as a threat. Certainty threats are often high for the feedback giver because we don't know how the other person will react. If the other person asks for feedback in a very general way – for example "What did you think of my presentation?" – we can feel uncertain about what exactly to focus on, and whether they really want feedback, or simply want reassurance.  Autonomy  Receiving feedback we did not ask for often creates autonomy threats. Giving feedback can sometimes trigger autonomy threats, for example, when an internal process for feedback is too prescriptive.  Relatedness  Receiving feedback for improvement can make us feel that the other person is not on our side, or even that they "have it in for us". This is a relatedness threat. When giving feedback we can feel concerned that it will damage the relationship.  Fairness  If we feel that the person giving us feedback does not have the full picture it can feel unfair. For example, if we miss a deadline because a team member was on sick leave, and the feedback doesn't take this into account. Sometimes feedback givers can feel that it is unfair that no-one else is courageous enough to give difficult feedback, so it falls on them, creating a feeling of resentment.  Why asking for feedback well is important  When you ask well, you create space for people to share well. Both sides feel less threatened. It is better for the asker because you experience autonomy because you decide who, when and what you ask. When you ask your status might still feel threatened, but less than when you receive unsolicited feedback. It is better for the giver because it provides status rewards – being asked for feedback sends a signal your input is valued. It also reduces uncertainty about what to say and how it will be received – you are less worried about offending the other person.  Asking for feedback creates better relatedness for both asker and giver – the conversation is a partnership. When you ask for feedback, others are more likely to do the same. This creates reciprocity. You get feedback more specifically, quickly and regularly. This is better for learning – you get what you need. This enables faster improvement – you get feedback when you need it rather than waiting a whole year to find out where you need to grow. You can ask many people, reducing bias. This increases the accuracy and relevance of the feedback. Asking for feedback primes you as the asker for a growth mindset because you are acting on the belief that you can grow and change.  Mindset has a big impact on how we process feedback.  When we have a fixed mindset we are more likely to view feedback as a threat and therefore avoid it. Research shows we tend to ignore feedback, and perform worse in response to feedback. When we have a growth mindset we are more likely to see feedback as an opportunity to learn and seek it out. We pay attention to feedback and perform better in response.  Why ask what to build on?  Feedback on what we are doing well is often neglected.  Due to the threat response we tend to over-focus on what isn’t working .  Positive feedback creates a reward response = receptive brain.  Start with what to build on as the asker- it sets the conversation up for success.  Without reinforcement of what we are doing well, we may stop doing these things, not realizing their value.  Why ask where to Refocus?  Addresses blind spots.  Offers alternatives and different ways of thinking that can unlock new insights.  Activates growth mindset in the asker  Feedback for improvement can feel uncomfortable, but it is better than getting surprised with unsolicited feedback. Application Examples of how to ask for feedback about what to build on and where to refocus:  For example, if you are working on improving the way you communicate, you might see an opportunity to ask for feedback after communicating the new strategy. You could ask what to build on by asking "What did I do well when I communicated the new strategy?" To find out where to refocus, you could ask "What aspects of my communication about the new strategy could I improve?" We can also ask explicitly about smaller details. For example, we could ask, "I am working on storytelling. Which stories did you find effective? Which ones would you change?" Scaling questions can be a great way to get specific data, for example, "How engaging did you find my stories, on a scale of 1-10?"  What are some tips to ask for feedback?   * If you are tempted to ask a general question like, “What do you think?”, instead ask a specific question like, “What is working that I can build on?” * If you are tempted to end a feedback conversation quickly, instead ask, “Is there anything else you want to share?” * If you are tempted to defend the behavior you’re receiving feedback about, instead focus on listening for value in the observations offered. * If you are tempted to perceive negative feedback as failure, instead discuss what you learned and ideas for what could be done differently. * If you are tempted to dismiss feedback for improvement, instead say, “Can you give me an example?” * If you are tempted to move quickly to a solution after receiving feedback, instead build in time to reflect and plan your next steps.   What are some tips to make feedback the norm?  Do less: Wait for formal review periods to give or request feedback, making it a rare and potentially stressful event.  Do more: Normalize asking for feedback in everyday interactions, establishing it as a continuous, constructive dialogue rather than an occasional critique.  Do less: Shy away from asking for feedback due to concerns about appearing incompetent or uncertain.  Do more: Explicitly ask for feedback from a variety of sources (peers, direct reports, managers) regularly, demonstrating openness to growth and valuing diverse perspectives.  Do less: Focus solely on what went wrong or places of failure when discussing performance.  Do more: Ask specifically about strengths to build on and areas for improvement, framing feedback in terms of growth and forward momentum.  Do less: Treat feedback as a one-way street, where only the leader provides it.  Do more: Encourage a feedback loop where everyone, regardless of position, feels comfortable giving and receiving feedback.  Do less: Limit feedback discussions to negative outcomes or mistakes.  Do more: Ensure feedback encompasses positive reinforcement, celebrating successes and reinforcing effective behaviors as much as addressing areas for development.  Do less: Assume people know the best way to provide feedback that is useful to you.  Do more: Guide your feedback providers by asking targeted questions that invite specific, actionable input that aligns with your personal and professional growth goals.  Do less: Leave feedback sitting untouched, without action.  Do more: Formulate and communicate a clear action plan based on received feedback, showing commitment to improvement and valuing the feedback given.  Do less: Encourage direct reports to only seek feedback from those within their immediate team or familiar colleagues.  Do more: Support direct reports in reaching out for feedback from a diverse and broad range of people across the organization, promoting the gathering of varied perspectives that can reduce the risk of bias and provide a more holistic view of performance and behaviors.  This adaptive approach positions feedback as an essential component of a supportive and growth-oriented workplace culture, emphasizing the mutual benefits of regularly exchanging constructive insights.  Question: How do I ask for feedback from others with whom I have been in conflict in the past?  Answer: Start with acknowledging that there has been tension in the past. You may then be clear about your intention for this interaction and a request for a partnership up front. Be mindful to use the language suggested in this course/workshop to facilitate a nonthreatening conversation. Blog post Feedback: The gift that keeps on giving  Sometimes when we ask for feedback, we don’t get what we expect, and this can leave us feeling uncertain or upset. Because our brains are highly sensitive to social threats, feedback for improvement can make us question our capability, our value, or even our identity. But constructive feedback can be a gift, and we can accept it with grace and ease by taking a few courageous steps.  To accept the gift: Label the emotion. Think of a piece of feedback you’ve received that might have had some merit but that you resisted. Label your reaction using one or two “feeling words,” for example: “offended and surprised.”  Adopt a growth mindset: Look for the opportunity. If the feedback were true, how could making a change benefit you? How could it benefit others?  Mitigate bias. To assess its accuracy, make a plan to ask a few more people for feedback about this area. Tip: Identify three people who are different from you and from each other, e.g., a mix of gender, cultural backgrounds, and thinking styles. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Employees may feel threatened by feedback, fearing it will negatively impact their status or sense of competence, which can lead to resistance or defensiveness.  **Solution 1:** Encourage employees to proactively ask for feedback, emphasizing its role in personal growth and learning. This approach helps maintain their sense of status and autonomy, as it positions them as active learners seeking improvement. Additionally, training on how to receive and interpret feedback constructively can further mitigate feelings of threat.  **Problem 2:** Creating a culture where feedback is routinely given and received can be difficult, especially in environments where feedback has historically been viewed negatively or used sparingly.  **Solution 2:** Leaders should model the behavior by regularly asking for and openly receiving feedback, demonstrating its value for personal and organizational growth. Implementing structured feedback mechanisms, such as regular check-ins and peer reviews, can also normalize the practice, making it a standard part of the work environment.  **Problem 3:** Feedback may not always be actionable or constructive, especially if it lacks specificity or relevance to the individual's development needs.  **Solution 3:** Train employees and managers on how to give effective feedback that is specific, focused on behaviors rather than personal characteristics, and linked to clear examples. Encouraging the practice of asking for feedback on specific areas can also ensure that the feedback received is relevant and useful for the individual’s growth and development. FAQS  * How can I ask for feedback in a way that reduces the feeling of threat and increases constructive responses? * What strategies can leaders use to foster a feedback-friendly culture within their team or organization? * In situations where feedback has historically been used negatively, how can we shift perceptions towards seeing feedback as a tool for growth? * How can we ensure that the feedback given is actionable and leads to meaningful improvement? * What are some effective ways to train employees and managers in giving and receiving feedback that aligns with personal development goals? | |
| Habit 3: Inspire great workSkill 2: Maintain momentum (F) Maria Banking (Italian) 5, 8, 11, 17 Marketing  [Daiyu’s story]  It’s time for Liaim’s weekly check-in, but Daiyu has a million other things to do, so she messages him:  [Show message app on computer screen or phone]  [Daiyu]: Hi Liam, I’m super busy today, so if there’s nothing urgent you need to discuss, would you like to postpone our meeting until next week? Then, you could take the time back to work on patient reports.  [Liam’s message pings back]: No, nothing urgent to discuss. It would be great to have extra time to work on my reports! Thanks!  Then, the next week rolls around, but Daiyu has a bad cold, so she’s out sick on the day they’re supposed to meet. The following week, an emergency again prevents them from meeting at the appointed day and time.  Finally, after four weeks, they’re both available for Liam’s check-in. Daiyu asks how Liam is doing with his continuing education course, and he says he’s missed a few key deadlines. “I just can’t seem to work it into my day,” he says. “With all the patients I need to take care of, I don’t have time to sit in front of a computer. And the material puts me to sleep.”  Daiyu doesn’t hide her disappointment. “Ben, you know how important these courses are for our hospital’s accreditation. How could you let this happen?”  Ben looks down and mutters, “I’ve just never been any good at academics. Maybe I’m not cut out to be a nurse.”  Research  Check-in conversations with your team members provide a great opportunity to help sustain their motivational drive toward their goals in several ways. However, if their frequency isn’t prioritized and if the conversations are focused on what the person has done wrong, rather than framing it with a growth mindset, it will be unproductive like the one Daiyu had with Liam.  Prioritize regular check-ins. One way to ensure the feedback you’re providing is accurate is to prioritize frequent check-in conversations. This will allow you to give a more timely and specific perspective rather than having to reflect upon and try to remember over long stretches of time. This will also help you to detect and address issues early on, before they become harder to navigate. Another reason not to allow too much time between check-ins is because of potential lapses in memory. It will be easier for your team members to continuously improve and for you to monitor their progress with a more current (and accurate) understanding of the behaviors you want them to express or work you want them to produce.  Frame the conversation to minimize threat. A primary goal for check-in conversations is to maintain your employee’s motivational drive. That’s why the first step is to begin by minimizing their perceived threat level. We are highly sensitive to potential threats in our environment, especially social ones, and these threats can trigger different levels of a threat response depending on how intense they are seen. For example, beginning a conversation by blaming your employee for a mistake or calling them out on a behavior that they are lacking in will trigger a mild to overwhelming threat in them, causing them to shut down or lose focus. In this situation, their limbic brain network, or threat-response system, is engaged, pulling essential cognitive resources away from the executive regions, like the prefrontal cortex. However, beginning the conversation with an opportunity to send social rewards, like a compliment on current work progress or a relatedness boost by talking about family or hobbies, can reduce potential threats to manageable levels, allowing the employee to engage their prefrontal cortex when receiving feedback.  Instill a growth mindset. Finally, when discussing progress on goals, a growth mindset is key. A growth mindset is the belief that one can improve over time, that mistakes are opportunities to learn from, and that feedback is useful. In fact, research shows that individuals who embrace a growth mindset pay higher attention to and learn from their mistakes, have a stronger neural connection between brain regions responsible for error monitoring and reward, and even have more gray matter in brain regions responsible for responding flexibly in light of new information. Encouraging your employees to embrace a growth mindset might mean that you reward small improvements toward goals or encourage them to experiment with their ideas and learn from others.  ACTIVITY 1:  How often do you have check-in meetings with your team members?  Options: More than once a week, weekly, biweekly, once a month, less than once a month (show a pie chart of results)  ACTIVITY 2:  How do you usually begin your check-ins with team members?  Options here?  [with a focus on where to improve, with a chat about social stuff…]  [Is there anything you could do differently to decrease their threat levels?]  ACTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM   * If I’m tempted to begin a check-in conversation with what I want to talk about, then I’ll ask my direct report what they’d like to discuss first. * If I’m having a check-in conversation, I’ll keep The SCARF® Model in mind and try to avoid sending threat signals. [or send some scarf rewards?] * If I need to discuss underperformance during a check-in, I’ll think about how to minimize threat and maximize insight toward room for improvement. (E.g., ask “How’s that project going?” instead of “Why haven’t you done that yet?”)   Daiyu’s story take two  It’s time for Liaim’s weekly check-in, but Daiyu has a million other things to do. She’s tempted to cancel, but she reminds herself how important it is to have regular check-ins with team members.  Daiyu begins the meeting by complimenting Liam on a great patient review he received recently. Then, she asks him if there are any challenges he’s facing.  Liam says he’s just begun his continuing education course, but it’s hard to find time to focus, and he’d rather spend time with patients than staring at a computer screen. “I guess I’ve just never been any good at academics,” he says.  “I’m glad you mentioned this,” Daiyu says. She explains how important continuing education is for Liam’s career as a nurse and his ability to provide the best patient care. She reminds him that he is good at academics — or can be, with the right focus — or he wouldn’t have made it through nursing school. She concludes by saying, “Let’s discuss some possible ways to make it easier for you to focus on studying. Are there times during the day when you concentrate best? If so, we can move your shift a bit. Another option could be reserving a quiet room to help you focus. Do either of these seem like they could help?”  Liam says he concentrates best first thing in the morning, so if another nurse could take his shift during the first hour, he could return the favor when they’re taking a course. He also asks if he could use the floor’s meeting room, with the door closed and nobody bothering him, to maintain his focus. Daiyu agrees, and with regular weekly check-ins, Liam completes the course with flying colors.  **NILES Content** High-level overview In "Skill 2: Maintain Momentum," participants will master the art of conducting effective check-in conversations that not only track project progress but also focus on personal growth, learning, and overall well-being. This skill emphasizes the importance of transforming conventional status updates into meaningful dialogues that inspire trust, foster a growth mindset, and maintain motivational drive. Through understanding the SCARF model, participants will learn to create conversations that elevate status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness, ensuring that team members feel valued, understood, and motivated to excel. By prioritizing frequent, quality check-ins, participants will be equipped to support their teams in achieving sustained momentum and peak performance. Theory **What are the elements of a quality check-in conversation?**  Quality check-in conversations create engagement, improve performance and help the person develop. Conventional wisdom is that managers check the status of current work and progress toward goals. The science says that check-in conversations should include outcomes, continued learning and growth, and employee well-being. This is more important now than ever before. “How are you really” fosters relatedness, which helps to build partnership and trust. Application It is so hard to move out of focusing on my team’s performance “today.” How do I shift this to create a growth mindset for my greater team?  The secret is to shift the conversations you have with your team by checking in with them at various stages of a project to offer support and a different perspective as things progress. Also, focus on your team’s growth and performance over time — not just the end result — and make it explicit in conversations with them.  How to use SCARF to create a toward state in check in conversations:  Status:  Avoid: Rushed, infrequent conversations  Instead: make time for quality conversations  Certainty  Avoid:Unclear conversation purpose or no agenda  Instead: Clear conversation purpose or agenda  Autonomy  Avoid: Dictating when to meet  Instead: Give choices about when to meet  Relatedness  Avoid: Ignoring that the other person is upset  Instead: Acknowledge or ask if the other person is upset  Fairness  Avoid: Giving feedback when you don’t have all the information  Instead: Give feedback that takes the full picture into account  **Check-ins support onboarding new hires**  Regular check-in conversations coupled with clear expectations add value when onboarding new hires. Examples of clear expectations might be: "By the end of the week I'd like you to understand the role and responsibilities of each member of your team, and which software applications we use for which tasks." or "In a month I'd like you to be confident to run client meetings"  Then provide choices and options where you can about how they could achieve the outcomes, e.g.  Some people might want a daily check-in with a buddy, others might prefer a more self-directed learning approach. Some might like to shadow and observe to gain confidence, while others want to dive in early. The same applies to upskilling juniors or mentoring others. A good principle is to let the learner lead and own the process as much as possible, giving them rewards in both status and autonomy. Another benefit of the learner owning the process: it also takes the pressure off the teacher / mentor.  Onboarding is often a complete brain dump inside companies, with leaders jamming everything you could possibly need to know into a 48-hour time period, onboarding is overwhelming to our brains. But on Zoom and the like, small groups of new employees can meet for 15 minutes on a Monday with one department, and come back together with other internal subject matter experts on Wednesday and Friday. What’s more, video conferencing allows new employees to learn from the person best at the role, instead of the person who happens to live in the same city, ensuring your best performers multiply themselves far more quickly.  During check-in conversations, do people just need to vent sometimes?  Answer: Sure they do, and that’s totally normal. But if you have a colleague or direct report who is in a pattern  of venting all the time, usually with a problem-focus, then their brain is not as able to generate creative solutions or even collaborate with others. In other words, they’re not able to do their best work. If someone is in a significant threat/away state, they can’t really hear what you’re saying anyway, so it’s better to reconvene at a different time when they’re calmer. You’ll be able to have a more productive conversation.  What are some tips to prime for growth mindset during check-in conversations?  Do less: Praise talent  Do more: Praise progress and effort    Do less: Focus solely on results  Do more: Focus on results, growth, and learning  Do less: Highlight natural ability  Do more: Highlight development  Do less: Set goals that are easily achievable  Do more: Set goals that require employees to stretch  Do less: Ask what they have done  Do more: Ask what they have learned  Do less: Rate their performance  Do more: Comment on progress    What are some tips for an effective check-in conversation?  At the beginning of the check-in conversation   * If you are tempted to say, “Here’s what I want to talk about”, instead try saying, “What would you like to discuss first?” * If you are tempted to say, “What are your current challenges?”, instead try saying, “What outcomes are you working toward?” * If you are tempted to say, “I’m concerned you are falling behind”, instead try saying, “How do you feel you are progressing?”   During the check-in conversation   * If you are tempted to say, “Why are you having these problems?”, instead try saying, “What solutions are you considering?” * If you are tempted to say, “Have you thought of trying (x)?”, instead try saying, “How have you approached similar challenges in the past?” * If you are tempted to say, “Here’s what I hope you’ve learned”, instead try saying, “What have you learned so far?” * If you are tempted to focus only on progress towards milestones, instead try asking also about what they are learning.   At the end of the check-in conversation   * If you are tempted to say, “I think you should focus on (x) next”, instead try saying, “What do you think are the next steps?” * If you are tempted to say, “Provide an update on (x) by Friday”, instead try saying, “When can you update me on (x)?” * If you are tempted to say, “I assume you know what to do”, instead try saying, “How can I support you?”   **What are some tips to maintain momentum?**  Do less: Schedule sparse, formal check-ins that might not address immediate needs or changes.  Do more: Institute regular, informal check-ins to stay connected, address issues promptly, and continuously reinforce progress, aligning with the SCARF model's need for Certainty and Relatedness.  Do less: Focus solely on achievements and outcomes, potentially triggering Status threats and Fixed Mindset responses.  Do more: Celebrate effort, learning, and growth as much as achievements, reinforcing a Growth Mindset and providing SCARF rewards like Status and Relatedness.  Do less: Dictate solutions and actions in check-ins, limiting the direct report’s sense of ownership.  Do more: Encourage direct reports to propose their solutions and next steps, fostering their sense of Autonomy and Status, critical components of the SCARF model.  Do less: Discuss goals in isolation, without connecting them to the broader team or organizational context.  Do more: Explicitly tie individual goals and achievements to team objectives, emphasizing the value of their contribution to the larger mission, enhancing their sense of Relatedness.  Do less: Overlook opportunities for direct reports to self-assess their performance and growth.  Do more: Facilitate self-reflection during check-ins, asking questions that guide direct reports to evaluate their progress and identify their own areas for development.  Do less: Recognize only major milestones or end goals, potentially overlooking important progress.  Do more: Acknowledge and celebrate small wins and learning moments along the way, reinforcing the importance of continuous improvement and resilience.  Implementing these strategies in check-ins can significantly enhance the effectiveness of these interactions, turning them into pivotal moments of connection, growth, and empowerment that propel both the individual and the team forward. Blog posts Understanding Insight  As a manager, you want to bring your employees to have insights of their own, as opposed to telling them what to do and micromanaging them on tasks. When employees generate their own insights, it motivates and engages them. It also saves time for the manager.  Andy Grove, a founder of Intel, always said that the goal of a good manager is to make themselves unnecessary. While that’s terrifying to many managers (and our brains), it’s also very true. And if you move your employees to generate their own insights, they can act in your place on certain topics, which frees up time for bigger picture discussions and actions.  To help employees generate insights, ask questions — but not about the deadlines, or the pace of work, or specific bullet items. Ask bigger questions about how projects connect, how things are flowing, roadblocks and challenges, etc.  Ask about solutions, not problems.  Working through the “why” and “how” of issues instead of the more basic questions moves employees towards insight faster — and when you have limited time with them, across distance, this should be your goal.  Other ways that managers can support employees in generating insights, as we mentioned in an October 2016 Harvard Business Review article:  Let them take breaks between meetings and find some alone time. Encourage an empty conference room or, even better, leave the office and take a walk outside. (Walking might in fact spur your next insight, according to scientists.)  Allow some downtime on a regular basis — even small doses can have a big impact. Encourage them (and do it yourself!) to turn your devices off for several hours a day – or several days a week if you can. This way your mind will be truly free to wonder, and your brain won’t miss the next light bulb moment when it happens.  Remember to take a break from any decision-making process. And once you are taking it, focus on something else. Exercise is a foolproof way to take your mind off work, so put a daily workout on your calendar the same way you would schedule a meeting with a client or boss.  All these help employees (and you) find quiet signals — also called “weak activations” — in the brain, which create more A-HA moments and insights.  And overall, asking questions about solutions, i.e. having a real two-way synchronous conversation on the business and the strategy and the long-term, increases reflection and raises a sense of status and autonomy in our brains. Telling? That decreases both. It’s about real conversations and moving employees to insight, as opposed to task-based check-ins.  Managers should aim for the highest tier of conversation with employees — it’s often called the “transformational conversation” level — where insights can happen. This does involve a bit of small talk on the front-end, but the conversation should be structured around goals, bigger-picture issues, long-range project planning, roadblocks, and how the employee is feeling about his/her career amid all the shifts in the work process.  If managers focus less on back-end logistics and more on high-quality, insight-reaching conversations, then organizations will be primed for the future of work. Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Managers often focus narrowly on immediate performance metrics, overlooking the broader aspects of employee growth and well-being. This narrow focus can hinder long-term development and engagement.  **Solution 1:** Encourage managers to broaden the scope of check-in conversations beyond immediate tasks and performance. Incorporate discussions about personal growth, learning opportunities, and well-being to foster a more holistic approach to employee development.  **Problem 2:** Employees may feel threatened or defensive during check-in conversations, particularly if the focus is on areas of improvement or if feedback is presented in a way that feels critical.  **Solution 2:** Utilize the SCARF model to structure check-in conversations in a way that minimizes threat responses. By focusing on Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, managers can create a more positive, supportive environment that encourages open dialogue and constructive feedback.  **Problem 3:** Sustaining motivation and momentum can be challenging, especially in long-term projects or when employees encounter obstacles.  **Solution 3:** Regular, meaningful check-in conversations can help maintain momentum by recognizing progress, addressing challenges promptly, and adjusting goals as necessary. By praising effort and progress rather than just outcomes, managers can foster a growth mindset and encourage resilience. FAQS  * How can I ensure that check-in conversations focus on both immediate tasks and long-term growth? * What strategies can I use to minimize defensive responses during feedback sessions? * How can I use the SCARF model to create a positive environment during check-ins? * In what ways can I recognize and address obstacles to maintain momentum? * How can I encourage a growth mindset through the structure and content of check-in conversations? | |
| Habit 3: Inspire great workSkill 3: Bridge performance gaps (M) Javier Technology (Hispanic) 4, 7, 12, 18 Engineers  Daiyu’s story]  Daiyu is having a problem with Katrina, one of the floor nurses on her team. For the last few months, Katrina’s patient reports have been full of errors, and she’s been turning them in late. While report errors are unfortunately common, Daiyu is determined to not be a part of the statistics. In addition to her sloppy work, Katrina has been late to the daily floor meetings and always looks like she just rolled out of bed. She seems to be in a permanent state of disorganization and lately has made sarcastic comments when asked how her patients are doing.  But Katrina wasn’t always like this; she used to be passionate about her work, hand in reports on time, and be a team member people looked to for advice when feeling down. Daiyu isn’t sure what to do, and she feels uncomfortable at the thought of having a conversation with Katrina. So, she tries to overlook the issue during their weekly check-ins and focus on Katrina’s excellent past performance. Finally, Daiyu realizes something must be done to address Katrina’s shortcomings, so she writes an email outlining her concerns. When she doesn’t hear back from Katrina for 24 hours, she sends a follow-up email with a frustrated tone. A few hours later, Katrina emails back her resignation from the hospital.  A month later, Daiyu finds out Katrina had picked up an additional job as a homecare nurse to help pay off student loans. Daiyu feels bad that she lost a good performer and wishes she had a conversation rather than sending an impersonal email.  Research  Bridging a performance gap may be one of the hardest conversations to have with a direct report. That’s because any time you point out that someone isn’t reaching their goals or is acting in an inappropriate way, you are directly targeting their sense of status. As humans, we are highly sensitive to being accepted or valued, and anytime we sense rejection or disapproval from others, this sends us into a threat state. Perceived threats can vary in intensity, from a manageable Level 1 threat that allows us to maintain our focus to an overwhelming Level 3 threat that affects our cognitive function. In fact, when we perceive a threat to our status from a manager, especially one that’s sent in an email in a way that’s more accusatory than empathetic, we might be driven into the strongest of threat states: Level 3. In the case of Katrina, Daiyu’s email directly targeted her sense of status and drove her into an overwhelming threat state, leading her to react in a way that aimed to protect that status and resign.  ACTIVITY 1:  What does it feel like if your performance or credibility is questioned?  (wordcloud)  Understanding how to lower a person’s threat to a manageable level can help us have a conversation that leads to solving the performance gap and moving forward. The SCARF® Model lays out the domains of psychological needs that can trigger either a sense of threat or reward. We know that pointing out errors and performance gaps can directly target someone’s sense of status and engage their threat-responsive limbic system. We also know that leveraging other domains and sending rewards can engage the reward circuitry and rebalance the threat level. We call this the offsetting effect. For example, sending rewards within domains of relatedness and fairness by asking about an individual with empathy and providing a chance to defend their behavior can offset the feeling of threat brought on by being made aware of their performance gap and help bring down their overall threat level. Or you can provide a sense of autonomy and certainty by asking where and when they’d like to have the conversation or whether they need more clarity on their goals or projects. Each of these can help bring the threat level to one that’s manageable, not overwhelming.  One of the critical steps in this kind of conversation is to determine the reasons for the underperformance. This can help when making a plan forward.  Sources of poor performance   1. Bored, not feeling stretched or growing. 2. Too much work, feeling overwhelmed. 3. Conflict with the manager or other employees. 4. Mental or physical health issues. 5. Feel disconnected to the purpose of work. 6. Feeling unrecognized or undervalued. 7. Unknown to you (or you haven’t asked).   ACTIVITY 2:  Think about an employee you’ve known who was (or is) underperforming. Which of the five factors above was the most likely source, or do you not know yet?  (poll)  How to have the talk:  Two types of performance conversations  One type of performance conversation is when you’ve decided to give an employee a serious warning or to let them go. The other is when you want to keep them but recognize things need to change. Daiyu wasn’t intending to fire Katrina. But because she didn’t have a conversation with her — and instead emailed — Katrina may have assumed she was about to be fired and jumped the gun and quit. Remember that in the absence of information, we tend to assume the worst. So, in preparing for these kinds of conversations, it's critical to be clear on the purpose, especially if the goal is to help the employee change their performance.  Give someone a clear warning or let them go  When the performance gap is so large that termination is imminent, you need to be as clear as possible about what’s happening. Maximize the person’s sense of certainty and autonomy as best you can by providing clear timelines and steps about what needs to happen. Provide information on how and when you came to these decisions to offer a sense of fairness and communicate this in a way that fosters as much relatedness as possible. Remember that being let go, or thinking there’s a risk of this, can hit the jackpot of all five SCARF® domains. So, do what you can to turn this from a Level 3 threat to, at most, a Level 2 threat. This will allow the person to hear your perspective, maintain a level of self-regulation, and not elevate the interaction to a conflict.  You want to keep them, but things need to change  When serious underperformance issues occur, and the employee hasn't addressed it themselves, you may need to initiate the conversation as opposed to waiting for them to ask for feedback, which can be threatening to the employee. And if it’s not structured in the best way, it can lead to misunderstanding, as we saw in Katrina’s case. The best way to deal with performance issues, assuming you’re trying to develop and keep someone, is in a real-time, 1:1 conversation. The ideal approach is to try to keep the conversation as nonthreatening as possible, or at a Level 1 threat. Remember, dealing with performance issues is one of the most threatening things you can do, and you need to work hard to make it a candid and helpful conversation. The key is to send as many positive SCARF® signals as possible, creating an offsetting effect.  Here are some examples:  Status: Focus first on the issues you appreciate about the person.  Certainty: Give them clarity upfront that you are not firing them but that some things need to change.  Autonomy: Ask someone what they know they need to work on and how much improvement they think they need. People giving themselves feedback are far less anxious, and they often know the performance gaps they have but will deny them if they feel attacked.  Relatedness: Focus on shared goals so they feel like they’re on the same side of the table.  Fairness: Provide a detailed account of how you came to the decision of having this conversation so the person doesn’t assume it was unfairly developed.  ACTIVITY 3:  In the past six months, how many times have you had to have a tough conversation with your direct reports about their performance?  [poll]  Which of the above SCARF® signals did you use?  [poll, answer as many…]  ACTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If an employee is underperforming, then I’ll have a conversation with them about it rather than sending an email. * If I need to have a conversation about poor performance, then I’ll plan ahead about how I can send the employee SCARF® rewards to balance threats. * If the performance gap is large, then I’ll provide clear timelines and steps about what needs to happen to avoid termination.   Daiyu’s story take 2  Daiyu is having a problem with Katrina, one of the floor nurses on her team. For the last few months, Katrina’s patient reports have been full of errors, and she’s been turning them in late. In addition to her sloppy work, Katrina has been late to the daily floor meetings and always looks like she just rolled out of bed. She seems to be in a permanent state of disorganization and lately has made sarcastic comments when asked how her patients are doing.  Daiyu recognizes Katrina wasn’t usually like this, so she clears some time to speak with her. She starts the conversation by being clear with why she wanted to speak with Katrina: She’s noticed a slip in the quality of her work and wants to help her get back on track. She then gives Katrina a status and relatedness boost by reminding her that her colleagues have always come to Katrina when they’re distressed and that she has a track record of being a quality worker. Daiyu then asks Katrina, “What do you think is causing this slip in performance?”  Katrina takes a deep breath and tells Daiyu about her financial difficulties and how she had to take on a second job. Daiyu listens and then asks Katrina what might be helpful for her right now: a change in her patient list to increase her efficiency while on her shift or reprioritizing some of her work? Katrina says she’d like to change her current patient list for now, at least for the time being. Daiyu works through the details with Katrina and lets the team know about the change in assignments.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In "Skill 3: Bridge Performance Gaps," participants learn to navigate the sensitive terrain of addressing underperformance through effective communication, grounded in the SCARF® model. This skill focuses on leveraging Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness to frame conversations about performance in a way that minimizes threat and fosters a constructive dialogue. Participants will discover strategies for initiating feedback conversations that encourage growth, understanding, and development, rather than defensiveness or disengagement. Through practical applications, they'll learn how to ask for permission to share feedback, provide clear, actionable insights, and create an environment where feedback is received as a tool for improvement rather than criticism. By the end of this module, participants will be equipped with the tools to effectively bridge performance gaps, enhance team dynamics, and support continuous personal and professional growth. Theory How SCARF explains the discomfort of conversations about underperformance  Status  When receiving feedback for improvement we may feel our status is being attacked – we might feel judged and undervalued. When we see someone as having equal or greater status than us, we can experience status threats when giving feedback/We may wonder if we have the right to give it.  Certainty  Sometimes when receiving feedback we sense a hidden agenda, or that the person is holding something back – this can create a certainty threat. Our brains tend to interpret any ambiguity as a threat. Certainty threats are often high for the feedback giver because we don't know how the other person will react. If the other person asks for feedback in a very general way – for example "What did you think of my presentation?" – we can feel uncertain about what exactly to focus on, and whether they really want feedback, or simply want reassurance.  Autonomy  Receiving feedback we did not ask for often creates autonomy threats. Giving feedback can sometimes trigger autonomy threats, for example, when an internal process for feedback is too prescriptive.  Relatedness  Receiving feedback for improvement can make us feel that the other person is not on our side, or even that they "have it in for us". This is a relatedness threat. When giving feedback we can feel concerned that it will damage the relationship.  Fairness  If we feel that the person giving us feedback does not have the full picture it can feel unfair. For example, if we miss a deadline because a team member was on sick leave, and the feedback doesn't take this into account. Sometimes feedback givers can feel that it is unfair that no-one else is courageous enough to give difficult feedback, so it falls on them, creating a feeling of resentment. **Application** Question: What do I do if someone isn’t willing or is unable to discuss areas of improvement because they think they’re doing a good job already?  Answer: If someone is unable or unwilling to dig into the challenging part of the conversation, consider their SCARF® needs first. The first step in facilitating behavior change is creating a toward state: Are you creating enough reward around status? Have you been clear about your intentions to support the person vs. evaluate them? Is there sufficient trust and rapport so that they feel comfortable? Have you shown that you value a growth mindset and believe people can always improve? If you’ve taken steps to create SCARF® rewards and the person is still unwilling or unable to discuss performance gaps, then you may ask their permission to add your perspective: “Now that I understand your strengths, I have a few observations relevant to your development that I’d like to share. Could I share those with you now?”  When someone on my team has had a major setback, how do I engage them in a way that does not patronize or minimize their efforts?  Focus on what you observed the person doing well during the project. Then ask open-ended, coach-like questions that help them see they are supported and not under scrutiny. For example, ask them what they thought went well during the project and what they learned from the experience. Acknowledge their intent to do good work and ask what they could do differently in the future. Try your best to facilitate a co-creative conversation.  How do you manage a situation when someone can’t see that they have a fixed mindset?  The solution lies in the ability to present opportunities for growth during challenging times. When targets  are not met, we tend to fall into the trap of scrutinizing the end results rather than focusing on the process taken and valuable learning that occurred along the way. The skill for managers to learn is how to position the situation in a way that reduces threat and creates dialogue and partnership in the learning process. Role model growth mindset through your actions and words. For example, it’s possible to prime others to approach an issue with a growth mindset with language like “what if ..?” or “how might we ...?”  How to send SCARF rewards when giving feedback  Status - ask the feedback-receivers for their own viewpoint on their performance first.  Notice we don't suggest starting with something positive, then telling them the negative feedback, then closing with something positive. This "feedback" sandwich is rarely well received because the positives don't feel genuine. That said, if you give regular, genuine positive feedback on a day-to-day basis, you are more likely to build trust and relatedness, which earns you the right to give feedback for improvement.  Certainty  Give your viewpoint with detail and clarity - avoid ambiguity. A good way to do this is to contrast current behavior with desired behavior. Some of us can talk a lot when we get nervous, which can obscure our message. Aim to balance being succinct with being specific.  Autonomy - Ask for permission before sharing your viewpoint and provide options wherever possible.  Relatedness - Take time to understand their goals and situation. If you feel uncomfortable giving the feedback, or unsure if it is accurate or helpful, consider saying so. This can be a way to show vulnerability, which can also build relatedness. e.g. "I feel a bit uncomfortable sharing this, but my goal is to be helpful".  Fairness – Acknowledge you may not have all the information and ask them to fill in the gaps. Remember, getting feedback when someone doesn't understand the whole picture or wider context can feel unfair.  Question: How do I manage a situation in which I share feedback but face resistance from the feedback receiver?  Answer: Try considering which SCARF® triggers get activated, creating a threat response in the other person that can prevent them from “hearing” the message. As humans, we have a tendency to rationalize and justify our behavior (e.g., I did this because XYZ). The key to getting feedback to land well and be heard is to provide it in a nonthreatening manner by setting the expectations right, creating a safe space, and offering specific feedback.  Question: When having a refocus conversation with a direct report, what should I do if I trigger them during the conversation?  Answer: Set clear expectations and goals for the conversation upfront. This provides clarity and certainty for the direct report about the scope of the performance conversation. For example, if you offer to help them develop a new skill, be clear on the scope of your help in the process.  Question: How do I give feedback that focuses on what “good” looks like?  Answer: Contrasting is a useful practice when having a refocus conversation. You need to be explicit in your discussion about what the existing behavior or misaligned skill is and contrast it clearly with your expected future improved behavior or skill. Allow the person to think of and share ideas on how they can shift behaviors or adjust their thinking or strategy. Mental contrasting is a technique where we help someone to notice their current reality, and to contrast it with their desired state.  It's about seeing both states side-by-side, as opposed to simply using "positive thinking". The future state needs to be a clear and vivid picture of what's possible and desirable. This helps activate visual areas of the brain, which helps us see a pathway to get there.  Question: What should I do during an unrequested feedback conversation to minimize a threat state for staff whose relatedness is high?  Answer: Make sure you pay close attention to how you frame the opening stage of the conversation. Be explicit about what you want from this conversation. Prepare your selected language and framing beforehand. If time allows, practice with a trusted peer.  Question: Are there situations where it’s more beneficial to withhold sharing feedback and instead share them at a later time?  Answer: Yes, there are situations in which one can postpone a feedback conversation to a time that is not emotionally charged for one or both parties involved. A thoughtful and constructive feedback requires time and place.  What are some tips for bridging performance gaps?  Do less: Jump immediately into giving feedback without allowing the individual to share their perspective.  Do more: Encourage direct reports to self-reflect and articulate their view of performance and areas for growth before offering your feedback, fostering a two-way dialogue that respects their Autonomy and Status.  Do less: Offer feedback in a way that might be perceived as undermining or demeaning.  Do more: Frame feedback to affirm the individual's value and contributions, carefully lifting their Status while addressing areas of improvement.  Do less: Provide vague, ambiguous feedback that leaves room for interpretation and uncertainty.  Do more: Offer clear, specific feedback that outlines exact areas for improvement and provides concrete steps for development, increasing the sense of Certainty.  Do less: Dictate exactly how improvements should be made, limiting the direct report’s sense of control.  Do more: Offer suggestions and guidance, but invite the direct report to choose their path to improvement, reinforcing their sense of Autonomy.  Do less: Isolate feedback to only between you and the individual, without considering the broader team context.  Do more: Integrate feedback within the context of team dynamics and collaboration, emphasizing the individual’s crucial role within the group, fostering a sense of Relatedness.  Do less: Give feedback without explaining the rationale behind your observations, which may seem arbitrary or unfair.  Do more: Provide a clear basis for your feedback, ensuring that the process is transparent and seen as fair.  Do less: Issue warnings in a way that clouds the seriousness with ambiguity, leaving the individual uncertain about the implications.  Do more: Clearly articulate the reasons for the warning, the specific areas of concern, the expected changes, and the timeframe for improvement. Offer support and resources to help meet these expectations, maintaining a balance between Certainty (about the consequences of not meeting expectations) and Autonomy (in choosing how to improve).  Do less: Conduct terminations in a way that feels impersonal, abrupt, or insensitive, potentially undermining the individual’s dignity and negatively impacting team morale.  Do more: Handle the process with the utmost respect, empathy, and clarity, ensuring the individual understands the reasons behind the decision. Maintain privacy and dignity throughout the conversation, offering support for the transition. Reflect on Fairness by ensuring the process is consistent with organizational policies and communicated with transparency, thus minimizing negative impacts on the remaining team’s perception of Relatedness and Fairness.  By centering interactions around SCARF® elements and inviting self-reflection, feedback becomes a positive force for growth and development, ensuring direct reports feel valued, secure, and motivated to bridge performance gaps. This approach aims to handle sensitive performance and transition scenarios in ways that respect the individual's dignity and the team's cohesion. Guided by the SCARF® model, leaders can address underperformance and communicate difficult decisions with compassion and clarity, maintaining a positive work environment and reinforcing a culture of mutual respect and growth.  What are some examples of if-then plans for giving feedback in a way that minimizes threat?   * If I recognize a more efficient way for my colleague to complete a task, then I’ll ask if I can make a suggestion that I think they might find helpful. * If my colleague asks for general feedback about their performance, then I’ll ask what specific area they would like feedback about. * If my team is feeling like their work is going unnoticed, then I will recognize my team publicly for work well done.  Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Managers may hesitate to address underperformance due to fear of triggering a negative reaction or damaging the relationship.  **Solution 1:** Encourage managers to initiate conversations with a focus on growth and development. Utilize the SCARF® model to approach feedback in a way that minimizes threat, particularly focusing on enhancing Status and Relatedness, to maintain a positive connection and open dialogue.  **Problem 2:** Employees might resist feedback due to perceived threats to their Status and Autonomy, viewing feedback as criticism rather than an opportunity for growth.  **Solution 2:** Train employees to seek feedback proactively, emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives for personal development. Foster an environment where feedback is seen as a mechanism for learning, ensuring that it is specific, actionable, and balanced with positive recognition to enhance Certainty and Relatedness.  **Problem 3:** Uncertainty about how to deliver feedback effectively can lead to vague, unhelpful comments that do not result in performance improvement.  **Solution 3:** Provide managers with tools and training on how to give clear, specific feedback that contrasts current behavior with desired outcomes. Encourage the use of if-then plans to offer structured pathways for improvement, catering to the Autonomy and Certainty needs of employees. FAQS  * How can I approach a conversation about underperformance without damaging the employee's sense of status? * What strategies can I use to ensure feedback is seen as an opportunity for growth rather than a critique? * In what ways can I make feedback more specific and actionable to effectively bridge performance gaps? * How can if-then plans be utilized to facilitate behavioral changes following feedback? * What are the best practices for maintaining a positive relationship while addressing areas of improvement? | |
| (MODULE 3 - Drive results)Habit 1: Make it safeSkill 1: Foster collaboration (psych safety-related: setting the stage) (F) Daiyu Hospital (white) 3, 6, 14, 19 Nurse manager  [Javier]  Javier’s team completed the coding for the new software a few weeks ago. Testing has identified a few bugs, but they shouldn’t take long to fix. However, in the time between coding and getting the test results, Javier has had a few ideas about how to improve the product. Because they’re running slightly ahead of schedule, it should be possible to implement all of the changes in time for the product launch — if everyone works overtime. At the next team meeting, Javier says, “I have some ideas about how to improve the user experience. In addition to fixing bugs, I’d like us to implement these changes.” He notices a few sighs and even an eye roll from members of the team, which frustrates Javier. “Listen, I know we’ve all been working hard — some of us harder than others — for the past few months, but these ideas I have are really great,” he says. “I need everyone to give 110%, and there’s no room for mistakes. Let’s see who’s the best coder on the team.” Javier proceeds to explain his ideas, but surprisingly to him, they’re met with little enthusiasm.  Research  In this scenario, Javier noticed signs his team wasn’t on board with making last-minute changes to the product, but nobody spoke up about their concerns. Not feeling safe to speak up or challenge ideas is a hallmark of an environment that lacks psychological safety. Defined as a shared belief that people won’t be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, psychological safety is known to be critical for organizations that aim to be innovative, effective and agile. Teams that are psychologically safe benefit from rich collaboration, learning opportunities and shared understanding.  Activity 1  Reflect on the best team you’ve been on. What words describe the team?  Word cloud?  Human beings evolved to survive in a group, so our brains are wired to find one. In fact, within minutes of becoming part of a team, individuals develop a preference for other members and feel rewarded when they succeed, engaging areas of the brain associated with empathy and reward. This is why when fostering a climate of psychological safety, we need to start with a focus on defining the team and its collective identity and clarifying its expectations around the work.  Javier didn’t unite his team with shared goals, but instead focused on his own individual goals and instilled a sense of competition, rather than cooperation, among the team. Also, he wasn’t clear about defining roles, so everyone just assumed they would have to do a lot more work but lacked certainty about the details.  Instead, he should have set the stage for a psychologically safe environment by aligning team members on a shared purpose and clear sense of identity. Reminding individuals of a shared set of team goals engages areas of the brain associated with goal-directed behaviors and valuing our future actions, such as the ventral striatum and ventromedial prefrontal cortex, sometimes called the orbitofrontal cortex. This drives feelings of intrinsic motivation. In fact, these preferences are enhanced when a team and its members are able to create an optimal balance of belonging and distinctiveness within and between other groups. Research has coined this phenomenon as optimal distinctiveness and shown that it leads to engagement of brain regions like the amygdala, which helps us to focus attention and emotion, and the orbitofrontal cortex. This can be accomplished by sharing the role that each team member plays toward achieving the shared goal.  Once a team has been identified, its members are intrinsically driven toward the group’s “why,” or value of potential goals, encoded by our brains’ motivational circuitry. In fact, its engagement is tightly linked to our sense of identity. So when our individual goals shift to align with those of the team, actions that benefit the team’s purpose generate a greater motivational engagement, becoming more valuable than individual goals or personal gain. Even the most selfish individuals can become invested in team goals.  Activity 2  Think of 3-5 shared goals you can communicate to your team. (Share them here?)  One important piece for fostering collaboration on a team is to create a set of shared expectations around the uncertainty of the work and how the team will work together in the face of uncertainty, especially around speaking up with concerns and challenging others. Unfortunately, we often perceive uncertainty as a threat, engaging our limbic circuitry, which we avoid, hindering our likelihood of engaging effectively. But if we set the expectation that we will face uncertainty or that things will go wrong, we lessen the potential threat around high-stakes work. Further, framing these expectations so that solving each problem is dependent on everyone speaking up will provide additional social rewards of value, fairness, and relatedness for team members, reengaging areas of the prefrontal cortex and enabling cognitive focus.  Activity 3  Reflect on a time when you didn’t have a clear idea of your role on a team. How did that feel? (Word cloud)  Obstacles are inevitable, yet we naturally view them as things to avoid, leading us to feel distracted and silenced by fear. Developing a set of shared if-then plans around speaking up and challenging others creates expectations around future actions and helps build mental maps that we can act on easier in the future, enabling teams to effectively breach obstacles.  ACTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If I sense that my team isn’t voicing their concerns, I’ll explain the importance of speaking up. * If my team is working on a new or existing project, I’ll explain the “why” and develop shared team goals. * If my team is working on a project, I’ll work with them to clearly define each person’s role in achieving our shared goals.   Javier’s story, take two:  Javier’s team completed the coding for the new software a few weeks ago. Testing has identified a few bugs, but they shouldn’t take long to fix. However, in the time between coding and getting the test results, Javier has had a few ideas about how to improve the product. Because they’re running slightly ahead of schedule, it should be possible to implement some of the changes in time for the product launch. At the next team meeting, Javier says, “Congratulations, everyone, on your excellent coding — we only have a few bugs to fix. We’ve all been working very hard and are ready to wrap up the coding phase of this project. But as we’ve discussed, the user experience can really make or break this product, and we all want it to be the very best it can be. I’d like to run a few ideas by you that could still be implemented before the launch.” Javier explains the ideas and also how important it is for team members to speak up with their own ideas and concerns. After weighing the pros and cons of different ideas, the team agrees on three improvements that would most elevate the user experience, and they divide the tasks among team members. Nobody has to work overtime.  NILES content: High-level overview In "Skill 1: Foster Collaboration," participants learn how to create a foundation of psychological safety within their teams, essential for enabling open dialogue, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. This skill emphasizes the importance of establishing an environment where team members feel safe to express ideas, questions, and concerns without fear of repercussions. Through exploring the SCARF model—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—participants will discover practical strategies for enhancing team interactions and communication. This includes learning how to lay the groundwork for psychological safety by inviting feedback, providing clear expectations, demonstrating empathy, and ensuring fairness in team dynamics. By the end of this session, participants will be equipped with actionable insights to foster a culture of trust and mutual respect, laying the stage for true collaboration and driving team performance. Theory Question: What is psychological safety?  Answer: Psychological safety is a shared belief that people won’t be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. This definition has been adapted from Amy Edmondson’s 1999 foundational article where team-level psychological safety is defined. It’s important to note that psychological safety is situational and dynamic. It’s going to be different for different people, in different moments of time, under different conditions, and in different phases of a project.  Question: What are the hallmarks of a psychologically safe team or organization?  Answer:   * Disagree productively * Challenge the status quo * Experiment and take appropriate risks * See mistakes as opportunities to learn * Consider each other's ideas * Hold each other accountable   Question: What is the relationship between the SCARF model and psychological safety?  Answer:   * Status answers the question…Is our input respected and valued? * Certainty answers the question… Do we know what to expect when we speak up? * Autonomy answers the question… Will our input affect the outcome? * Relatedness answers the question… Do we feel united as a team? * Fairness answers the question… Do we all have equal chance for input?  Application To make it safer for others to speak up to you, try applying SCARF® as described below:  Status   * Lay the groundwork: Regularly invite people to provide feedback and challenge you. * During the conversation: Listen in a non-defensive manner. Thank them for proactively seeking to solve a problem.   Certainty   * Lay the groundwork: Specify times and channels for people to speak to you. * During the conversation: Summarize and clarify what they say to check you have heard them correctly.   Autonomy   * Lay the groundwork: Demonstrate seeking input from others before sharing your own ideas and perspectives. * During the conversation: Get permission before asking questions or challenging their point-of-view.   Relatedness   * Lay the groundwork: Reassure people that their relationship with you will be made stronger by speaking up. * During the conversation: Display authenticity and humility. Acknowledge emotions that arise and use SCARF® to label them.   Fairness   * Lay the groundwork: Seek input from quieter voices. Consistently act on feedback and communicate the results. * During the conversation: Consider how this might benefit the team or organization. Ask yourself "What is the right thing to do?" rather than "What is the easy thing to do?"   When you want to speak up to your manager, try applying SCARF as described below.  Label SCARF threats that you experience as you consider speaking up:   * Status: Concerned my job will be at risk. * Certainty: Can't predict about how the other person will react. * Autonomy: Wondering if I have the option to speak up. * Relatedness:Worried about damaging my relationship with this person. * Fairness:Concerned about being labeled as difficult, or not a team-player.   Send positive SCARF signals when you speak up:   * Status: Reassure them that you hold them in high regard and wish to discuss a specific behavior and not them as a person. * Certainty: Clearly state your intentions for the conversation. * Autonomy: Invite them to share their ideas and collaborate with you to find a resolution. * Relatedness:Demonstrate empathy and express a shared goal. * Fairness: Share your perspective about what transpired and invite them to share their perspective.   What are some tips to foster collaboration?  Do less: React defensively or dismissively when team members express differing opinions, potentially diminishing their sense of status.  Do more: Acknowledge and validate contributions from team members, regardless of their position. Thank them for their input, which enhances their status by showing their opinions have value.  Do less: Offer vague responses to suggestions or questions, leaving team members uncertain about where they stand.  Do more: Provide clear and direct feedback on ideas, even if they are not immediately actionable. Explain the reasoning behind decisions to maintain transparency, which increases certainty.  Do less: Micromanage responses and solutions, limiting team members' sense of control and contribution.  Do more: Encourage team members to propose solutions and explore their ideas. Support them in taking ownership of projects or initiatives, boosting their sense of autonomy.  Do less: Respond more favorably to certain individuals or ideas, which may be perceived as unfair or biased.  Do more: Create a structured process for discussing and evaluating ideas, ensuring every team member’s voice is heard and considered equally. Acknowledge and address any biases or preconceptions openly to promote a culture of fairness.  Do less: Dismiss or penalize team members for raising concerns or presenting alternative viewpoints, which stifles open communication and innovation.  Do more: Encourage and reward the expression of diverse opinions and constructive challenges, making it explicitly clear that such contributions are valued and vital for team growth and problem-solving.  Do less: Allow the team to operate without a clear, unified understanding of their purpose, leading to misalignment and lack of motivation.  Do more: Collaboratively define and communicate a compelling team purpose that resonates with all members, aligning their efforts and strengthening their commitment to common objectives.  Do less: Set goals unilaterally or without considering the individual strengths and motivations of team members, risking engagement and ownership.  Do more: Develop shared goals through inclusive planning and consensus, ensuring each member sees their role in achieving these objectives. Foster a strong team identity by celebrating unique contributions and success as a collective, enhancing the sense of Relatedness and Fairness.  This approach to fostering collaboration underlines the importance of psychological safety and a strong team foundation built on the SCARF model. By strengthening these areas, leaders can cultivate an atmosphere where team members feel secure, valued, and united in their pursuit of common goals, driving results through enhanced collaboration and innovation. Blog posts Learn the employee’s reward system.  Not everyone processes appreciation the same way, making it important to understand what kind of recognition and feedback each employee values. Our SCARF® Model provides a shortcut that identifies five core social needs every person has:  Status, or wanting to feel esteemed  Certainty, or wanting context and clarity  Autonomy, or having a sense of control over your outcome  Relatedness, or wanting to connect  Fairness, or feeling you’re treated equally  The more connections at work can satisfy each of those domains, the more satisfied people will feel. The key, though, is ensuring you understand individuals’ motivations; if you get them wrong, your praise could feel like punishment. For example, a worker who scores high on status may love a personal shout-out during a department-wide meeting, while someone who isn’t motivated by status may feel embarrassed by the attention and would’ve preferred receiving a compliment in private.    Make impromptu calls about praise — and praise alone.  For many, an unexpected email or text with a request to “jump on a quick call” doesn’t bring about the most pleasant of feelings. But consider using a quick video chat for nothing but praise every once in a while. Remember to be as specific as possible in your acknowledgement. “You’re great,” could describe a lot of people, but “You’re great because you found a way to combine three steps of the approval process, which saves our team time,” provides clear feedback on what you really valued and how it affected others, which is far more intrinsically rewarding.    Track your credit giving.  Many organizations have tech-based peer-to-peer feedback tools in place, but to hold yourself accountable to giving more credit, experiment with documenting the way you’ve delivered feedback or praise throughout the week. You’ll not only have a record of who’s getting credit and why, you’ll have a chance to be more thoughtful about how you’re identifying good performance and whether your praising capabilities are agnostic to where employees work from. It’ll help with year-end reviews, too.  Let employees take the wheel.  Who says managers are the only ones who can praise employees? Sometimes the best credit can come from team members. One way to encourage this practice is to ask for individual “shout outs” at group meetings so that colleagues can praise each other, and non-team members can learn about contributions and problem-solving happening in other organizational departments. Because at the end of the day, one of the best aspects of giving credit is making others feel valued and appreciated. Challenges and Solutions Problem 1: Team members may hesitate to share innovative ideas or concerns due to fear of judgment or negative repercussions, limiting creativity and problem-solving capabilities within the team.  Solution 1: Encourage open dialogue by regularly inviting and valuing everyone's input, regardless of their role or status. Implement structured feedback sessions where all team members can contribute equally, and reinforce the importance of diverse perspectives for team growth. Acknowledge and reward constructive contributions to reinforce a positive feedback culture.  Problem 2: Lack of clarity and unpredictability in communication channels can lead to uncertainty, reducing team members' willingness to take risks or speak up about potential issues.  Solution 2: Establish clear protocols for communication, including regular check-ins and updates, to provide a predictable structure. This increases certainty and confidence among team members to express their thoughts and suggestions. Summarize and clarify points during discussions to ensure understanding and alignment.  Problem 1: In highly competitive environments, team members might feel isolated or pitted against each other, undermining the sense of unity and relatedness essential for effective collaboration.  Solution 2: Foster a sense of belonging and in-group identity by highlighting shared goals and achievements. Encourage collaboration over competition by setting team-based objectives and celebrating collective successes. Create opportunities for team bonding and empathy-building activities to strengthen interpersonal connections and trust. FAQs  * How do I create a sense of in-group in my team? * How do I create a sense of identity for my team? * How do I create shared goals with my team? * How can I encourage team members to share their ideas more openly, especially when they seem reluctant? * What strategies can be implemented to reduce uncertainty and increase clarity in team communications? * In a competitive work environment, how can we foster a culture of collaboration rather than competition among team members? * What are effective ways to acknowledge and reward contributions that enhance team collaboration and psychological safety? * How can managers effectively address and mitigate the SCARF threats that team members might experience during collaboration? | |
| Habit 1: Make it safeSkill 2: Optimally include (inc. parallel processing: active inclusion, make it easy to contribute) (M) Chayton Government (Filipino) 2, 9, 13, 16, 20 Finance  Javier’s story  Javier and his team are approaching the launch date of their latest software product. In the weeks leading up to the launch, his team has been having joint Zoom meetings with the company’s sales and marketing teams to figure out the best ways to position the product. As they discuss key features to highlight in marketing materials, Javier notices the same people seem to pipe up and share thoughts, while others rarely speak. Although he keeps reminding the group they need input from everyone, senior-level team members continue to be the only ones who regularly speak up. So at the beginning of this week’s meeting, he announces everyone will be required to submit an email summarizing their input after the meeting. He knows this may feel like micromanaging to some, but he’s at a loss for how to get everyone to contribute.  Research  Humans often get stuck in a place of comfort that limits our ability to improve or speak up. Several factors come into play here. One of these is the impact of social power: Our sense of status within a group influences whether we’ll share an idea and how receptive we’ll be to someone else’s idea. Those who feel a sense of power or status will be motivated to take risks and speak up, while those who don’t may be less willing to take risks and content to blend in and listen. In fact, humans are incredibly sensitive to social hierarchy and will almost immediately assess social rank in a social context, and this is underpinned by a distinct set of brain regions, such as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. If this assessment leads to a perception of low status, it engages the brain’s threat circuitry, limiting the ability to explore something new or contribute ideas.  Activity 1:  Think about the last time you held a thought to yourself rather than speaking up in a meeting. Share why you didn’t speak up.  (word cloud)  Activity 2:  When your team appears quiet in meetings, what is your current strategy for encouraging them to speak up?  (multiple choice/poll?)   1. Nothing. I figure if they had something to say, they’d say it. 2. I remind them how important it is to hear from everyone. 3. I call on specific people who aren’t speaking up. 4. I provide a variety of ways for people to contribute ideas. 5. Other   Unlocking a team’s curiosity or voice requires all members to have a growth mindset — the belief that everyone can learn and improve — and to be humble about what they might be missing. Mistakes are valued opportunities for improvement, not shameful events to hide. Embracing a growth mindset fosters curiosity and engages regions of the brain involved in rewards, goals, and learning, leading to superior team performance.  Focusing on humility as a leader, specifically situational humility, is especially important when working collaboratively on a team. This is defined as having confidence in your expertise, understanding that you can’t know it all, and sharing both. As a leader, role modeling humility can lessen the threat associated with asymmetrical power dynamics and encourage curiosity in others, thereby increasing learning. So, when we engage in humility, we boost the brain’s ability to accept and learn new information.  Activity 3:  Name something you know well and something you have more to learn about in your current role.  Even when teams align on the need for wide input, it’s essential to develop techniques, approaches, and channels to encourage frequent and seamless participation. Naturally, we choose to act in ways with the largest benefit and least cost, and interpersonal risks are one of these costs. Putting strategies in place to share ideas in various ways will prioritize the giving and receiving of input, making it more likely to become a habit.  Inviting full team participation involves intentionally seeking perspectives through creative questions and active listening. This engages a set of neural systems that consider another’s mental state and integrate it with our own, leading to more effective collaboration on a shared goal. Research shows that active listening leads to neural synchrony across individuals, correlated with overall shared understanding. Thus, through this kind of intentional inclusion — involving humility, multiple ways to engage, and active listening — we create an environment of effective communication and increase the likelihood of learning and innovation.  Let’s focus on how we can offer multiple avenues for sharing or engaging. Often referred to as parallel processing, this allows the team to contribute in ways that align with their strengths and preferences. Another way to encourage diverse perspectives is for leaders to speak after team members, creating an atmosphere where all voices can be heard and flourish without undue influence and to not succumb to conformity bias. Lastly, prioritize the inclusion of virtual meeting attendees by allowing them to speak first, minimizing distance bias by ensuring their voices are heard and valued even when they're not physically present. These strategies collectively promote a more inclusive, open, and creative work environment.  Activity 4:  What avenues do you currently offer your team to contribute?  (word cloud?)  ACTIVITIES TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If I sense that team members aren’t speaking up because of power dynamics, then I’ll model situational humility. * If people aren’t speaking up verbally in a meeting, I’ll offer other ways to contribute. * If, as a leader, I’m tempted to speak first, I’ll remind myself to speak last.   Javier’s story, take two:  Javier and his team are approaching the launch date of their latest software product. In the weeks leading up to the launch, his team has been having joint Zoom meetings with the company’s sales and marketing teams to figure out the best ways to position the product. He mentions that it’s important to get input from everyone because nobody has all the answers. “I’m pretty good at coding, but I couldn’t sell water in a desert,” he jokes. When discussing which features to highlight in a product flyer, Javier’s tempted to share his thoughts first. But then he pauses, remembering he should share last to avoid conformity bias. He also remembers that some of his team respond better when they’ve had time to reflect. So, he opens a shared document with a few key questions and drops it into the chat window of the virtual meeting. He then suggests that anyone who wants to speak up during the meeting do so while he types notes in the document. Others can add their thoughts anytime within the next 24 hours. When he checks the document the next day, Javier finds contributions from everyone on his team.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In "Skill 2: Optimally Include," participants will learn essential strategies to enhance team collaboration and inclusivity, with a focus on parallel processing for effective virtual meetings. This skill aims to equip leaders with techniques to ensure every team member can contribute their ideas and insights, fostering a culture of active inclusion. By applying principles such as specifying clear goals, inviting diverse inputs, and using technology to facilitate simultaneous contributions, leaders can create an environment where all voices are heard equally, mitigating biases and increasing engagement. This skill emphasizes the importance of balancing efficient decision-making with the need to listen to everyone's ideas, promoting a growth mindset across the team. Through practical applications like SCARF®-based strategies for inclusive meetings and tips for running hybrid sessions, participants will learn how to make meetings more productive and inclusive, ensuring that every team member feels valued and able to contribute to their fullest potential. Theory Question: What is parallel processing and how is it beneficial?  Parallel processing is a powerful way to optimize virtual meeting effectiveness. It’s a technique that allows everyone in a group to do things efficiently and inclusively, and to make sure everyone feels safe and gets to contribute:   * Allows everyone to process the entirety of presented information and get aligned. * Requires everyone to engage simultaneously. * Allows everyone to share their ideas and observations without the influence of others. * Increase inclusion: Everyone gets to contribute * Increase insights: Gives people reflection time which is known to aid connection building in our brains. * Bias mitigation: Equalize all voices and mitigates more prominent voices. * Optimization of time: Everyone shares simultaneously to get more ideas faster as opposed to “taking turns”.  Application Question: How do I find a balance between listening to everyone’s ideas and being efficient in making  decisions and running meetings?  Answer: It is important to remember that giving all team members the opportunity to contribute ideas does not mean that every team member needs to share, nor will share, all the time and on every topic. Creating inclusion means fostering an environment where everyone feels invited to give input but does not require everyone’s input to achieve inclusion.  Question: How do I practice optimal inclusion?  One of the principles we talk about a lot at NLI is optimal inclusion, or thoughtful exclusion. A trend we are seeing, due to our need for certainty in the hybrid world, is over-inclusion. We may copy everyone on emails and invite everyone to meetings, "just to be safe".  When you exclude people, be mindful this can create a Status threat – people may feel they are not valued. To mitigate this:   * Explain you are excluding them to give them some time back. * Check your thinking – are they okay with being excluded? * Ask if they want to nominate another attendee as their "delegate" – so their perspective is represented.   Make sure you have processes in place so that non-attendees are kept in-the-loop, for example:   * Invite comments about decisions before the meeting via a shared document. * Send out succinct minutes summarizing decisions, actions, and owners.   One organization we worked with required non-attendees to read the notes summarizing the meetings and then confirm they had done so via an internal Slack group. A responsibility assignment matrix like the RACI might be helpful for deciding who to invite versus who to update.  What are some tips to run inclusive meetings?   * Show that you appreciate people's contributions – thank them, or comment on how useful their input is. Positive feedback creates social rewards and encourages people to keep contributing. * Try saying at the start of the meeting, "You are here because I value your opinion. I want to hear from you" * Invite people to contribute via the chat, or in a shared document. This is a way to support people who need a bit longer to process their thoughts, or who prefer to write than to speak. * Invite people to question and challenge you. Let people know they can do this during the meeting, or they can message you afterwards. * Varying the time of day we hold meetings is a way to be inclusive of workers in different time zones, as well as people's varying schedules, for example, part time workers, or parents with school pick-up commitments. * Seek input into the agenda prior to the meeting and check for additional agenda items at the start of the meeting. * Allow time for each agenda item and seek contributions from all attendees. * Clarify the decision-making process, e.g. voting, consensus. * Seek feedback about the meeting style and format, and implement suggestions for improvements. * Respect people’s time and that they have other commitments by starting and finishing on time.   What are some tips to run inclusive virtual meetings?   * Watch for people coming off mute as a sign they want to speak - it's the equivalent of hearing an in-drawn breath when meeting face to face. * Or, establish a norm of raising your hand when you want to contribute. * Apply the principle "One virtual, all virtual". This means if even one person is joining remotely, everyone logging in from separate devices, even if you are in the same building. * We are aware that many people hate this idea, and at NLI, we resisted it for some time. We used to run hybrid meetings with a group of people in a room. We spent a lot of time and money getting the right technology to support this, but it never worked well. People would forget to talk into the microphone, or not hold it close enough. The people at home struggled to hear, couldn't see the nuances of expressions on people's faces, and they missed side conversations. * The principle "One virtual, all virtual" puts everyone in the same position. When we switched to this, our remote staff reported feeling much more included. * Consider accessibility on a virtual platform: Find out if anyone has accessibility needs, and what they need from you to feel fully included. * This is a big topic that you can research further, here are a few examples: If you have attendees with a vision impairment, be prepared to describe gestures, images and videos. For attendees with hearing impairment: ensure your face is visible and well lit for lip reading, and use a virtual meeting platform that has closed captioning available. This will also generate a transcript that can be shared afterwards. * Remember the R in SCARF: Relatedness is one of our five social needs. Informal connection is one of the things we hear that people miss the most in a hybrid environment. When we are in-person moments of connection tend to happen naturally, often before or after the meeting, or during side conversations. In a virtual meeting or a hybrid meeting we need to be more intentional. * When you can, allow time at the start of a meeting for fun and informal connection. Perhaps everyone introduces their pet, or shares their highlight from the weekend. * The chat feature can be a way to create fun and connection during the meeting. For example, encourage attendees to give kudos and positive affirmations via text and emojis. * Cameras on if possible: Ever heard the saying "out of sight, out of mind?" When some people are off-camera we tend to call on them less, and value their input less. This is due to a type of unconscious bias called distance bias. Try saying, "If you can't be on camera for the whole meeting, come on at the start if you can, so we can say hello".   How do I run inclusive hybrid meetings?   * Hear from remote participants first. Distance bias tends to make us forget they are there. * Have great technology that makes the experience seamless. * Rigorously enforce inclusive habits for people in the room: Use a microphone and hold it at the right distance, face the camera, describe anything going on in the room that can't be seen on camera, e.g. describe or photograph a flipchart; and consider using a moderator to monitor online chat.   When should I use parallel processing?   * When you want the team to more deeply process information in the moment. * When you want to seek authentic and creative input from the entire group without the need to hear a spoken contribution from everyone.   What are the steps for parallel processing?  Step 1: Clarify what type of input you need from the group, plus goals and roles.  Step 2: provide time for everyone to process the information at their own pace.  Step 3: Get input: Use hand signals for basic input and understanding, for example, a thumbs up , side, or down. Use the chat function to collect insights and reactions. Prepare a shared document or virtual whiteboard for developing ideas.  Step 4: From here you can prioritize and move to decision-making based on the input you gathered.  Here are the steps for parallel processing steps framed another way:   1. Frame the shared goal or objective – what are we trying to solve? 2. Identify the essential input that you need. Ask specific, clear questions - ideally no more than three items to avoid overloading people – we all have limited cognitive capacity. 3. Create space and quiet time to allow people to reflect and share without rushing (and potentially falling prey to Expedience bias).   What technology could I use to support parallel processing?   * Chat function – a simple tool to use during a virtual meeting to allow everyone to contribute simultaneously. * A real-time poll in a virtual meeting can be used to anonymously gather input and data, for example, voting yes or no. * Shared digital documents that can be edited in real time, e.g. a google document. These are a great way to brainstorm ideas and to organize a lot of information. Everyone can see and respond to each other's ideas in real time. * For in person meetings: sticky notes and flipcharts can be used. * Hand signals can be good for small decisions and temperature checks, e.g. thumbs up, Fist to five (fingers up to indicate numbers 1-5).   What are some tips to optimally include?  Do less: Conduct meetings where only one person speaks at a time while others passively listen, leading to potential disengagement or conformity.  Do more: Employ parallel processing techniques, such as collaborative document editing or using digital tools for real-time feedback and idea sharing, to enable multiple voices to contribute simultaneously, enhancing engagement and diversity of thought.  Do less: Conduct meetings in a manner that doesn’t actively invite participation from all members, particularly those who might be introverted or less inclined to speak up.  Do more: Use varied methods to collect input (e.g., chat, shared documents) that cater to different communication styles. Clearly state at the beginning of meetings that all perspectives are valuable and desired, and actively invite quieter members to share their thoughts.  Do less: Position yourself as having all the answers due to your role or experience, potentially stifling other viewpoints.  Do more: Demonstrate humility and express genuine curiosity about others’ ideas and solutions, encouraging a culture where team members feel valued and respected.  Do less: Rely on a select group of individuals for input and decision-making, overlooking the diversity of insights within the team.  Do more: Proactively seek and value diverse perspectives from all team members, regardless of their role or seniority, to foster a richer understanding and innovative solutions.  Do less: Listen with the intent to reply, often missing the deeper meaning or nuances in what is being said.  Do more: Practice active listening, focusing fully on understanding the speaker's message and responding thoughtfully, validating their contribution and enhancing dialogue.  Do less: Allow dominant voices to overshadow others, limiting diverse contributions.  Do more: Use round-robin or directed questioning to ensure each participant has a chance to speak and share their input, fostering equal participation.  Do less: Overlook the engagement tools available in virtual meeting platforms, potentially leading to passive participation.  Do more: Utilize engagement features such as polls, breakout rooms, and reaction buttons in virtual and hybrid meetings to keep participants active and involved.  Do less: Conduct virtual meetings with video off, missing nonverbal cues and reducing personal connection.  Do more: Encourage video use to enhance the sense of presence and engagement, while being mindful of bandwidth and privacy concerns, to observe nonverbal cues that inform inclusive facilitation.  Do less: Automatically include everyone in every meeting and email to cover all bases, which can lead to information overload and reduced productivity.  Do more: Thoughtfully consider who truly needs to be included to avoid overwhelming team members. Explain exclusions as a means to respect their time, ensuring those not involved are aware they are being given space to focus on other priorities.  Do less: Exclude individuals without explanation, potentially creating a Status threat by making them feel undervalued or left out.  Do more: When excluding someone, communicate your reasoning clearly and ensure they understand the exclusion is for efficiency, not a reflection of their importance. Offer them the opportunity to nominate a delegate if they wish to ensure their perspective is still represented.  Do less: Leave non-attendees out of the loop, creating gaps in information and possible misalignment.  Do more: Implement processes to keep non-attendees informed, such as sharing pre-meeting documents for input and distributing succinct minutes, ensuring everyone is aligned and feels included even if they were not in the meeting.  Do less: Overlook the need to acknowledge and appreciate each team member's input, which could dampen their motivation to contribute.  Do more: Express gratitude for contributions, regardless of how small, and highlight the impact of these contributions, fostering a culture of positive reinforcement and inclusivity.  Employing these strategies transforms the environment into one where team members feel genuinely invited and empowered to contribute, fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration. Through parallel processing, designing inclusive meetings, demonstrating humility and curiosity, seeking diverse perspectives, and practicing active listening, leaders can drive results by making the most of their team’s collective intelligence. Blog posts How to Help Introverts Feel Empowered to Speak Up in Meetings  As a leader, you’re responsible for managing all different kinds of people. And that’s a good thing, because research has shown that diversity helps prevent groupthink and drives creativity and innovation.  But managing an assortment of different personality types also poses certain challenges—like creating an environment in which both extroverts and introverts feel comfortable sharing their ideas in meetings.  Since meetings often involve brainstorming and active group discussion, they can be challenging for introverts. Not comfortable enough to speak up, they wind up keeping good ideas to themselves.  So what can you do as a leader to create an environment in which introverts feel safe to contribute their insights? Check out our science-backed tips below.  1. Help me help you  Every employee is different, and no one approach will work for every introvert on your team. What will work, though, is taking the time to find out what each person needs.  If someone on your team seems hesitant to speak up, talk to them privately and say something like: “I’d love for you to have a voice in our group discussions so we can put you and your ideas more front and center. But I want to do that in a way that feels comfortable for you. Can you give me some ideas about how I can support you in doing that?”  By treating each person as an individual rather than a broad personality type, you can tailor your efforts to their unique style. Often it’s as simple as saying, “How can I help you?”  2. Don’t wait for an invitation  Some leaders try to be sensitive to the needs of introverts by watching for signals, such as leaning forward or making eye contact. If an employee gives signs of wanting to speak, leaders may assume they can then help that person out by giving them the floor.  It sounds reasonable enough. But in the throes of a fast-paced meeting, with ideas flowing freely and many people talking, you’re likely to miss or misinterpret those cues.  More importantly, an absence of cues doesn’t imply a lack of ideas. Many introverts who make no attempt to speak up nevertheless have valuable ideas they’ll share if called on. So when you notice that someone hasn’t had a chance to share, do them a favor and give them the opportunity.  3. Create opportunities for people to shine  When you know someone’s uncomfortable speaking up in a group, it may seem like the best way to help them out is to speak on their behalf. Especially if that person has previously articulated their ideas to you one-on-one, you may be tempted just to paraphrase what they said and give them credit for the thought.  But there’s a fine line between empowering someone and overshadowing them. Rather than speaking for introverts, a better approach is to create opportunities for them to shine. You can do this simply by asking them if they’d mind sharing their thoughts with the team.  By inviting introverts to present their own ideas, you help them build a sense of agency—and you promote an inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable. The more you create such opportunities over time, the more people will feel comfortable speaking up on their own.  4. Make time for thinking  Extroverts are comfortable thinking out loud, formulating their ideas in real time as they go. Introverts are different. They tend to be careful thinkers who take more time to process information and formulate their ideas.  An easy way to help introverts feel safer to share their ideas is to give them time to think about what they want to say before they say it. You can do this at the top of the meeting when you talk through your agenda, saying something like: “Here’s the question we’re discussing today. Later I’m going to ask each of you to weigh in with your thoughts.” Even better, you can send an email to your team in advance listing the questions you’ll be discussing.  Another approach is to carve out time during the meeting itself for people to reflect on a critical question. Too often, meetings are about jockeying for a chance to speak. This creates a dynamic that prevents anyone from listening enough to reflect deeply on what they’re hearing.  Try creating a Google Doc in which you pose a critical question to the group. Then, give everyone time during the meeting to record their own thoughts and insights. Finally, ask everyone to read and reflect on each other’s answers before you begin the group discussion.  The introverts on your team will appreciate having time to think about their answers and express them in written form, and the quiet time will help spark creative insights. The result will be a discussion that’s more thoughtful and productive for everyone on your team.  Make the Most of Virtual Meetings by Learning to Reduce Your ‘Distance Bias’  What should we be doing while most are remote?  We’re not necessarily advising leaders to start calling people out at random, although some cultures do allow for it. Instead, we’d like to propose a few ways leaders can shift their approach:  More pre-work for meetings: Have the owner of the meeting create a memo or document explaining the purpose of the meeting and the goals/action items. Make it a shared document so that people can leave thoughts beforehand, and then address those thoughts in the back-half of the actual meeting. It’ll remind people, Oh hey, Kathy is in this meeting, and help minimize their bias. Not to mention, when people are prepared, the quality of the meeting is better.  “Farthest Person First:” Ask for feedback on the point of the meeting and goals from the farthest person (away from HQ/core) first. Any other initial weigh-ins or opinion solicitations can be done in reverse mileage from HQ, to avoid distance bias. When you return to in-office or hybrid, keep this model going.  For the in-person participants, use a white board to list who is on the phone/video component of the call: Sounds basic, and it is, but you’ve definitely sat in meetings and thought 35 minutes in, “Oh, Craig is on this call?”  Meet briefly and frequently  Another upside of virtual platforms is the ability to implement shorter meetings, replacing the standard 30-minute ones with 25 or 15-minute meetings. This allows people more breaks and focus time.  One Awful-Sounding Idea That Will Actually Fix The Flaws Of Hybrid Work: “One Virtual, All Virtual”  You can’t solve all the concerns about hybrid with one approach, but there is a concept that helps you get close. There is one guideline that tackles the engagement issue, and the productivity issue, and creates inclusion. We call it “One Virtual, All Virtual.”  I introduce this concept to executives with a warning and a promise. “Here’s an idea you will absolutely hate at first. But you will come to love it and understand why it works.”  The idea is this: if you have even one person who works remotely, you design meetings and the general culture around everyone being virtual. And when you have a meeting, even if a few people are in the same location, they each and join the call virtually, different rooms. No one is clustered together.  It’s a tough pill to swallow, because it feels like it has so many downsides. Weren’t we all excited to get off all those virtual meetings? Aren’t we supposed to be trying to minimize Zoom Fatigue?  And if you have a team of six, with four physically in the office, logically it feels more right for the four to meet in person and let the other two join using other options. That’s how we’ve always done remote and dispersed work.  The trouble is, if your firm has a good proportion of people working virtually, other options turn out to be even more terrible. Conference calls (“Did Jan just join?”), speakerphone, and video chats with one person in their bedroom and 10 others together in a conference room are all bad options for ideation and employee connection. The quality of communication, collaboration, and creativity all plummet.  Now think about inclusion and exclusion: If you’re at home, and see four people in a conference room laughing and having side conversations, you feel left out. It’s not the intention of those four people to exclude you, but it happens. It’s painful to feel excluded, even if everyone in a room together had best intentions.  With what feels like only bad options for running meetings, you enter a long-known concept known as “Buridan’s Ass,” or in lay terms, the ‘Lesser of Two Evils’ (or, for Russell Crowe fans, a lesser of two weevils).  Why technology may not be the fix we hope  At NLI, we went hybrid around 2017, specifically because it was producing better work and a better company to not force anyone to work in an office. At first we thought the way to integrate a dispersed workforce was with technology. We spent a lot of time and money setting up conference rooms so that people could hear and see well, both in the room and those who were remote.  After a lot of experimentation, we realized that making this work required tremendous conscious effort, and ongoing vigilance. A number of human habits kept rearing their heads. To name just a few:  People kept having side conversations  People did not speak loudly enough  People were not speaking at the right distance from a microphone  People kept forgetting to mute their laptop, resulting in an ear splitting echo  It turns out all the technology is useless if the humans using it keep doing the wrong thing. It was one thing to spend a lot of money setting up some specialized rooms. It was another thing to notice that it took many weeks of regular usage of the room for people to build the right habits, and every new person in that room also took significant time.  Now try to imagine scaling this to every team in an organization, with a constant flow of new employees. We realized it is just radically easier to have people follow a really simple rule — one virtual, all virtual.  The unexpected upsides to one virtual, all virtual  There are actually big upsides to everyone being on a platform if the meeting is run well. To begin with, good use of the chat can make meetings faster, more inclusive, and less biased.  This works best on a video platform, e.g. Zoom. Use the chat feature for sharing ideas and feedback. Have everyone in the space they do their best work in, and pause the meeting periodically with a focused question for people to answer in the chat (“What do we think about the road map right now? What are the best and worst elements?”).  Consider also using a “parallel processing” meeting, where everyone takes 10 minutes to review a document, adding insights/comments as they go. Or someone can present an idea, and everyone in parallel can add thoughts in a new document about its strengths and weaknesses. With everyone sharing, the best ideas rise to the top, instead of the most confident voices, and everyone feels equally included.  The most important aspect is the location element, though: if one person is virtual, everyone should be separate and virtual. “As one goes, so we all go” is the essence of teamwork. Any successful team is built around principles of psychological safety, and putting everyone on the same playing field meeting-wise helps team members feel safe, included, and connected.  Some awesome other consequences we saw  First, people came into the office less. You can see that as a demerit if you’re paying a lot for your space, but offices are not where most people do their best work. We’ve been surveying orgs on this for years; one study of 6000 employees found that only 10% of people did their best thinking at the office. Look at revenue numbers of multiple companies from 2020, and it’s easy to argue that being at home more increased productivity. Offices are noisy and brain-distracting. Let people have the autonomy to work where they do their best, most innovative work.  People scheduled shorter meetings. Almost all 30-minute meetings became 20–25, and virtually every 1-hour meeting became 50 minutes. This gave people time to recharge, gave their brains space to refocus. On top of this, good meeting design literally makes virtual meetings shorter, by nature of how quickly the conversation can move around, and the use of the chat function. Plus, now you don’t have all the downtime of finding your next meeting room, which on some campuses can be a long way away.  One unexpected upside of this rule was that when people were in the office, they weren’t running from meeting to meeting: they were talking to each other about life, work, families, etc. Employees used the time in the office to build relationships, they didn’t just complete tasks or attend meetings. They spent time with other humans, and did different kinds of activities — having lunch and thinking about big ideas for example.  Mitigating biases and fostering inclusion  This one virtual, all virtual approach removes some of the sting of distance bias — our natural tendency to favor things closer to us. This approach allowed people to work where they wanted, but at the same time we got a diversity of voices on important topics.  Choosing this option, as much as it might feel like the lesser of two evils, also reduces expedience bias. It’s an approach that fosters autonomy and relationships across your team. Right now we’re seeing a good chunk of companies rushing headlong into mandated decisions (“We all come back in November,” etc.) and that’s not going to work. You will lose talent.  In the past few years, we’ve had countless discussions societally about inclusion, both in the workplace and more broadly. Inclusive cultures are achieved with a series of small, repeatable actions done over time. You have to take small steps constantly. One virtual, all virtual is one of those steps — it makes everyone feel as if they’re part of the bigger team, even if they might be sitting 1,500 miles away from the majority of their core team.  One Virtual — All Virtual. It’s a simple idea that sounds terrible in theory, but ends up being beneficial to nearly everyone in practice. To top it off, this habit will ensure your company is maximally adaptive, should we suddenly all go back to work from home, which we’re beginning to realize may be something we need to keep in mind for the future.  **Embrace parallel processing**  Not everyone is a fan of parallel processing, which involves people simultaneously working in a document. But it can work wonderfully on virtual platforms because it creates efficiencies; instead of asking everyone to think on a problem and come back with ideas, that problem-solving happens in real-time. Here’s how it works: put a single document with the meeting intent into the chat, and let everyone review it for five to seven minutes. Then come back together and have the facilitator ask for questions, comments, and feedback.  You can use the Socratic method and call on people, or encourage employees to drop comments in the chat. This process of bringing everyone together in the same document, and cuing them for reaction afterward, ends up creating a more inclusive, efficient environment than a standard in-person meeting. Whereas in-person meetings often get dominated by one or two “big voices,” platform-based meetings can elicit multiple perspectives.  **Best practices for hybrid work**  Understand the logistics and behaviors of successful virtual meetings  Turn on your video, and encourage everyone to do so if they are able to. This builds relatedness and connections and helps mitigate distance bias.  Start with a ‘human’ check-in and show genuine warmth. Keeping people at arm’s length feels formal. When virtual, pull your sliding scale of social distancing in closer.  Provide certainty. Share your intent before asking for input. Let the attendees know they are important and you will interact with everyone regularly throughout the meeting.  If possible, share the agenda ahead of time so those who want to can prepare if needed. If there is a big decision to be made, allow people to think about it before the meeting. And pay attention to the volume of agenda items—consider quality vs. quantity.  Adopt the mindset of inclusion. Plan on hearing from everyone, not just the most outspoken. See the attendees as a source of learning instead of competition or threat.  As the meeting leader, lower your status a bit to encourage more participation. Ask questions more than you give instructions. Provide choices to give a sense of autonomy. Give your opinion after others have shared theirs.  Don’t cut people off. Let them finish their thought. It can be hard to do, especially in a virtual environment, but coming in over the top of them says you don’t care enough to listen. If someone is taking more time than expected, when they take a breath say something like, “We will need to move on so the next person can share.”  Build psychological safety. Allow space for people to think out loud and create habits for sharing mistakes. Also, make people feel valued even if their answer isn’t what you were expecting. Respond with a genuine positive remark like, “Wow, that’s an interesting connection,” and show curiosity by asking for more info. Remember, how you handle these situations determines if people will contribute to the rest of the meeting.  In 1-on-1 virtual meetings, focus on quality and insight, not deadlines and tasks  In a few weeks, you might be sitting next to people you haven’t seen in 15 months except on video calls; in other cases, you might have a new teammate in Poland who was an elite find for the organization — and you may never meet him, but now you’re in the trenches together.  Things are vastly different. You need a growth mindset to help get through that, and manage stress.  The good news: growth mindset can be developed over a short period of time, and you can inspire your team to constantly learn and develop new skills. We talk often these days of “up-skilling” or “re-skilling,” but many of those programs have very low success rates. Instilling a growth mindset in your people over time, through small repeatable actions, is a better approach — and an essential need for managers post-COVID.  Employees and managers alike can grow through quality conversations. Try opening a dialogue with a direct report by discussing where they see their career in three years, or bounce some executive-level strategy off them and get their take. If you have a mix of in-person and virtual, adopt a “one virtual, all virtual” rule which means no people can be together, even if they’re in the same office. It cuts down on exclusion, clique-y behavior, side conversations, etc. and helps to make the at-home people (the virtual ones) feel less left out. Work on having quality meetings as well: memos to open and parallel processing review (everyone works on the same document for 10 minutes, then comes back to discuss it). Quality conversations and meetings help teams grow.  Help your employees maximize their cognitive capacity  Some strategies:  Schedule frequent breaks and actually follow through (ditto for vacations)  Institute “speedy meetings” and put Parkinson’s Law to work—while you relax  Provide options for flexible and remote work approaches  Practice optimal inclusion to decrease inefficiency and conserve others’ time  Unplug completely at day’s end to decrease stress after hours  Leverage technology to work more efficiently  Carve out quiet reflection time at the end of team meetings Challenges and Solutions **Problem 1:** Team members feeling excluded in virtual meetings, leading to diminished participation and reduced diversity of thought. This often happens when dominant voices overshadow quieter ones, or when the meeting structure does not facilitate equal participation.  **Solution 1:** Implement "parallel processing" techniques in meetings to ensure all voices are heard equally. Utilize shared digital documents and real-time polls to gather input from all participants simultaneously. This approach helps mitigate bias by equalizing contributions and encourages reflection, leading to more inclusive and effective idea generation.  **Problem 2:** Over-inclusion in meetings and communications, creating information overload and reducing efficiency. Leaders often invite too many participants to meetings or copy numerous people on emails "just to be safe," which can dilute the focus and impact of discussions.  **Solution 2:** Practice optimal inclusion or thoughtful exclusion by being strategic about who needs to be involved in meetings and communications. Explain the rationale for exclusions to mitigate potential status threats, and ensure processes are in place to keep non-attendees informed. This targeted approach enhances meeting efficiency while maintaining a sense of inclusion.  **Problem 3:** Difficulty in fostering a sense of relatedness and ensuring fairness in hybrid meetings, where some team members may feel marginalized or less included than those attending in person.  **Solution 3:** Adopt the "One Virtual, All Virtual" rule for meetings when at least one person is joining remotely. This ensures that everyone, regardless of their location, participates under the same conditions, fostering equality and minimizing distance bias. Additionally, vary meeting times to accommodate different schedules and time zones, and actively seek input from all attendees to promote fairness and relatedness. FAQS  * How can I ensure that everyone on my team has an equal opportunity to contribute in virtual meetings? * What strategies can I use to prevent dominant voices from overshadowing quieter team members in discussions? * How can I balance the need for inclusivity with meeting efficiency without causing information overload or unnecessary participation? * What are some effective ways to implement the "One Virtual, All Virtual" rule without causing resistance among team members who prefer in-person interactions? * How can I utilize parallel processing techniques to enhance team collaboration and creativity in a hybrid work environment? | |
| Habit 1: Make it safeSkill 3: Enable healthy debate (SCARF signals, SEEDS) affirm warmly, challenge kindly) (F) Maria Banking (Italian) 5, 8, 11, 17, 21 Marketing  Javier’s story  It’s the day before the launch of the new software, and Javier’s team is racing to identify any possible remaining problems. There seems to be a never-ending list of items to check and test, but so far, things seem to be going well. Then, shortly after noon, Amir, one of Javier’s direct reports, rushes into his office. He thinks he’s identified a security flaw in an app associated with the software that could compromise customer information. Javier says, “We’ve used versions of this app with different software products before, and we’ve never had any issues. I don’t think it’s something we need to worry about.” Javier turns away from Amir and goes back to checking items on his list. Amir pauses, and then says, “Yeah, it’s probably okay. I’m just being paranoid. I’ll let you get back to work.” The next day, the launch occurs, and in the following weeks, thousands of customers’ accounts are compromised, prompting a class-action lawsuit and negative publicity.  Research  The human brain has evolved to help us weigh the costs and benefits of possible actions before we take them. Potential risks, discomfort, or uncertainty are weighed against the strength of a need or potential reward. When we recognize a team member for speaking up (a potential interpersonal risk), activity in their brain’s reward pathways gives them a rush of dopamine, making it more likely they’ll repeat that behavior. Thus, leveraging the power of these pathways is one way to encourage others to take interpersonal risks. However, in this case, when Amir took a risk by speaking up, Javier increased the cost of his voice by challenging his input, making it less likely that Amir will share his thoughts again.  The SCARF® Model, which we covered when discussing how to create buffers for yourself and have motivating conversations with your team, can also provide a template for how to send social rewards that affirm the input of others, helping them feel acknowledged and valued for sharing their perspective. For instance, when individuals receive recognition of their idea or input, satisfying the need for status, this engages the reward circuitry, driving individuals to repeat those behaviors. Similarly, it provides a sense of relatedness, further strengthening interpersonal bonds. Social affirmations can also build resilience to help us face future obstacles as opposed to unconstructive past ruminations.  Activity 1  Using each domain of the SCARF Model, share a sentence you could say to reward a team member when they challenge your idea.  S -  C-  A- R- F-  (share answers)  An engaged team moves forward together. However, when faced with decisions, especially when stakes are high, it’s easy to ignore another’s perspective in favor of previously used solutions. This is an example of a mental shortcut, or cognitive bias, that allows us to make efficient judgments based on prior knowledge — conserving cognitive energy but preventing us from being aware of new information. In this case, ignoring another’s perspective in favor of your own is referred to as an experience bias, one of the five types of cognitive biases defined in the SEEDS Model®. By continuing to speak the shared language of The SCARF® Model, which allows us to challenge others kindly, we can also use The SEEDS Model® to mitigate biases and help teams move forward together.  Activity 2  Reflect on a time you were tempted to ignore a team member’s input. Which bias(es) from The SEEDS Model® came into play?  (maybe a poll?)  ACTIVITIES TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If a team member challenges my idea, then I’ll send them SCARF rewards for speaking up. * If I’m tempted to ignore a team member’s perspective, then I’ll pause to ask myself if one or more cognitive biases could be getting in the way. * If a team member challenges my idea, then I’ll respond with curiosity rather than defensiveness.   Javier’s story, take two:  It’s the day before the launch of the new software, and Javier’s team is racing to identify any possible remaining problems. There seems to be a never-ending list of items to check and test, but so far, things seem to be going well. Then, shortly after noon, Amir, one of Javier’s direct reports, rushes into his office. He thinks he’s identified a security flaw in an app associated with the software that could compromise customer information. Javier says, “Thanks for bringing this to my attention! We’ve used versions of the app with other software and not had any issues, but let’s take a look together.” Amir shows him what he’s discovered, and Javier quickly calls a team huddle. They debate vigorously — do they take a chance and launch the software, or delay the launch by a few days to fix the potential problem? In the end, the team decides to delay the launch until the following week, giving them time to ensure customer information is secure.  **NILES content** High-level overview In Skill 3: Enable Healthy Debate, participants will master techniques for fostering an environment where constructive debate is not just welcomed but encouraged. The course leverages the SCARF and SEEDS models to teach participants how to affirm contributions warmly and challenge ideas kindly, ensuring debates drive innovation without sacrificing team cohesion. You'll learn to initiate discussions that value diverse viewpoints and push for creative solutions, all while maintaining a psychologically safe space for team members. This skill empowers leaders to navigate and guide debates effectively, aligning team efforts towards innovative solutions and fostering an inclusive culture that prioritizes growth and continuous improvement. Theory Start with “us” to create a sense of team purpose. Human beings evolved to survive in a group, so our brains are wired to find one. This is why when fostering a climate of psychological safety, we start with a focus on defining the team and its collective identity and clarifying its expectations around the work.  To set the stage for a high-functioning team in a psychologically safe environment, members must first align on a shared purpose and clear sense of identity. Within minutes of becoming part of a team, individuals develop a preference for other members and feel rewarded when they succeed. In fact, these preferences are enhanced when a team and its members are able to create an optimal balance of belonging and distinctiveness within and between other groups. Research has coined this phenomenon as optimal distinctiveness and shown that it leads to engagement of brain regions like the amygdala, which helps us to focus attention and emotion, and the orbitofrontal cortex, an area that responds to what we value.  Once a team has been identified, its members are intrinsically driven toward the group’s “why” or value of potential goals, encoded by our brains’ motivational circuitry. In fact, its engagement is tightly linked to our sense of identity. So when our individual goals shift to align with those of the team, actions that benefit the team’s purpose generate a greater motivational engagement, becoming more valuable than individual goals or personal gain. Even the most selfish individuals can become invested in team goals.  Set expectations help frame the work. Due to the dynamic challenges in knowledge work, we’re guaranteed to encounter uncertainty. Unfortunately, we often perceive this as a threat, which we avoid, hindering our likelihood of engaging effectively. But if we set the expectation that we will face uncertainty or that things will go wrong, we lessen the potential threat around high-stakes work. Further, framing these expectations so that solving each problem is dependent on everyone’s ideas will provide additional social rewards of value, fairness, and relatedness for team members, reengaging areas of the prefrontal cortex and enabling cognitive focus. For efficient, innovative teams, this process is continuous. Don’t just set the stage once; continue to build team distinctiveness.  Anticipate obstacles to move forward. Obstacles are inevitable, yet we naturally view them as things to avoid as they activate our threat circuitry, leading us to feel distracted and silenced by fear. Developing a set of if-then plans around speaking up and challenging others creates expectations around future actions and helps build mental  maps that we can act on easier in the future, enabling teams to effectively breach obstacles.  To enable healthy debate, we need to make the benefits of speaking up outweigh the costs.  The human brain has evolved to weigh the costs and benefits of possible actions before we take them. Potential risks, discomfort, or uncertainty are weighed against the strength of a need or potential reward. When we recognize a team member for speaking up, activity in their brain’s reward pathways gives them a rush of dopamine, making it more likely they’ll repeat that behavior. Thus, leveraging the power of these pathways is one way to encourage others to take interpersonal risks.  The SCARF® Model provides a template for how to send social rewards that affirm the input of others, helping them feel acknowledged and valued for sharing their perspective. For instance, when individuals receive recognition of their idea or input, satisfying the need for status, this engages the reward circuitry, driving individuals to repeat those behaviors. Similarly, it provides a sense of relatedness, further strengthening interpersonal bonds. Social affirmations can also build resilience to help us face future obstacles as opposed to unconstructive past ruminations.  An engaged team moves forward together. However, when faced with decisions, especially when stakes are high, it’s easy to ignore another’s perspective in favor of previously used solutions. This mental shortcut, or cognitive bias, allows us to make efficient judgments based on prior knowledge — conserving cognitive energy but preventing us from being aware of new information. By continuing to speak the shared language of The SCARF Model®, which allows us to challenge others kindly, we can also use The SEEDS Model® to mitigate biases and help teams move forward together.  Invite Participation:  Humans have evolved to learn, and curiosity is what propels us to explore the unknown. Yet, we often get stuck in a place of comfort that limits our ability to improve. And when we have a fixed mindset, we shy away from challenges. Power dynamics also come into play: Our sense of status within a group influences whether we’ll share an idea and how receptive we’ll be to someone else’s idea. Those who feel a sense of power or status will be motivated to take risks and speak up, while those who don’t may be less willing to take risks and content to blend in and listen. A perception of low status engages the brain’s threat circuitry, limiting the ability to explore something new or contribute ideas.  Model humility: Share what you don’t know  Unlocking team curiosity requires all members to have a growth mindset — the belief that everyone can learn and improve — and to be humble about what they might be missing. Mistakes are valued opportunities for improvement, not shameful events to hide. Embracing a growth mindset fosters curiosity and engages regions of the brain involved in rewards, goals, and learning, leading to superior team performance.  Situational humility is having confidence in your expertise, understanding that you can’t know it all, and sharing both. Modeling it can lessen the threat associated with asymmetrical power dynamics and encourage curiosity in others, thereby increasing learning. Neuroscientists define humility as an individual’s recognition of what they know as well as what they can improve on or where they lack understanding. So when we engage in humility, we boost the brain’s ability to accept and learn new information.  Make input easy  Even when teams align on the need for wide input, it’s essential to develop techniques, approaches, and channels to encourage frequent and seamless participation. Naturally, we choose to act in  ways with the largest benefit and least cost, and interpersonal risks are one of these costs.  Putting systems in place to share ideas in various ways will prioritize the giving and receiving of input, making it more likely to become a habit.  Foster curiosity  Inviting full team participation involves intentionally seeking perspectives through creative questions and active listening. This engages a set of neural systems that consider another’s mental state and integrate it with our own, leading to more effective collaboration on a shared goal. Research shows that active listening leads to neural synchrony across individuals, boosting overall understanding. Thus, through this kind of intentional inclusion — involving humility, multiple ways to engage, and active listening — we create an environment of effective communication and increase the likelihood of learning and innovation. Application What are some tips for enabling healthy debate and engaging in uncomfortable discussions?   * If you are tempted to jump into the debate with an adversarial mindset, instead connect the debate to a shared goal. * If you are tempted to have a broad, wide-ranging debate, instead define the specific scope of the debate and the desired outcome. * If you are tempted to start the debate by stating your conclusion or recommendation, instead start with evidence and/or a question. * If you are tempted to avoid challenging others in order to keep things collegial, instead challenge with respect and candor. * If you are tempted to control the debate yourself, or allow another person to control it, instead invite and encourage full participation from all parties. * If you are tempted to focus on the person, instead focus on the ideas. * When you are tempted to defend your opinion, instead seek challenges to your opinion. * If you are tempted to look to a senior person for answers, instead come to a conclusion together. * If you are tempted at the end of a debate to leave things open or unsaid, instead align and connect at the close of the conversation.   How can I set the stage for psychological safety?  Do less: Encourage individual competition.  Do more: Encourage individual and team goals.  Do less: Focus only on your own work.  Do more: Consider how your role impacts others.  Do less: Assume people speak up when they need to.  Do more: Explicitly discuss why speaking up is valued.  Do less: Let others determine why they’re here.  Do more: Be clear about the impact of our tasks on the work.  Do less: Avoid mistakes and failure at any cost.  Treat mistakes as learning tools.  Do less: Avoid potential challenges.  Do more: Prepare for potential issues with If/Then plans.  How can I create psychological safety in team meetings?  Do less: Be the expert in the room.  Do more: Be the learner in the room.  Do less: Only speak to what you know.  Do more: Speak to what you do and don’t know.  Do less: Assume people will give input as needed.  Do more: Ask for input explicitly, broadly, and often.  Do less: Require people to speak up on the spot.  Do more: Create variable ways for input over time.  Do less: Provide the answers.  Do more:Ask creative questions to discover together.  Do less: Listen to respond.  Do more: Listen to learn.  How can I create psychological safety “in the moment” when people in my team speak up?  Do less: Move on quickly to avoid spotlighting the negative.  Do more: Pause to appreciate contributions and validate.  Do less: Hold all questions until the end.  Do more: Value all inputs even if they feel disruptive.  Do less: Ignore obstacles until they come up again.  Do more: Face obstacles to discuss, consider, and brainstorm.  Do less: Respond with brutal honesty.  Do more: Be candid while minimizing unnecessary harm.  Do less: Quickly determine if the input is helpful.  Do more: Schedule time to reflect on other perspectives.  Do less: Frame the problem and ask for solutions immediately.  Do more: Create the conditions for insight to support problem-solving. Challenges and Solutions **Challenge 1:** Team members may hesitate to speak up or challenge ideas due to fear of conflict or disrupting team harmony.  Solution 1: Cultivate a team culture that prioritizes psychological safety, where differing viewpoints are seen as valuable contributions to the team's success. Use the SCARF model to acknowledge and reward contributions, thereby affirming the status and relatedness of each team member. Encourage team members to share their perspectives by asking open-ended questions and actively listening to their responses, demonstrating that all voices are respected and valued.  **Challenge 2:** Debates can sometimes become personal, leading to potential conflicts and a breakdown in team cohesion.  **Solution 2:** Implement the SEEDS Model to mitigate unconscious biases and maintain focus on the issue at hand rather than personal attributes. Foster an environment where feedback is delivered with warmth and challenges are presented kindly, focusing on ideas and behaviors rather than personal characteristics. Train team members to differentiate between critiquing ideas and critiquing individuals, reinforcing the principle that healthy debate is about finding the best solution, not winning an argument.  **Challenge 3:** Some team members dominate discussions, while others remain silent, leading to an imbalance in contributions and potentially overlooking valuable insights.  **Solution 3:** Structure debates and discussions to ensure equitable participation from all team members. Use techniques like round-robin sharing or assigning specific roles (e.g., devil’s advocate) to encourage input from quieter team members. Leverage parallel processing tools, such as collaborative digital platforms, where everyone can contribute their ideas simultaneously. This approach helps to level the playing field, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered, thereby enhancing the team’s collective intelligence and creativity. FAQS  * How can we ensure that disagreements during a debate are viewed positively and lead to constructive outcomes rather than conflict? * What are some effective ways to encourage quieter team members to participate more actively in debates? * How can a team leader effectively model situational humility to foster an environment conducive to healthy debate? * In what ways can we utilize the SCARF model to minimize potential threats during a debate and ensure a productive discussion? * What strategies can be employed to prevent biases from influencing the outcome of a debate and ensure all perspectives are fairly considered? | |
| Habit 2: Solve problems fasterSkill 1: Improve team decisions (CREATE) (F) Michelle Utility (African American) 1, 10, 15, 22 Customer service  [Maria’s story]- govt finance  As a result of recent government policy changes, Maria’s finance team has grown by a few project managers to help support new processes and increase efficiency. Now they need to decide how they’ll work together, which tasks each team member will own, and a clear plan forward. So Maria schedules a meeting at the beginning of the week. She starts by outlining the policy shifts and ideas she has for how to integrate the new team members. But people immediately start claiming tasks and projects as their own and squabbling about seniority, expertise, and who should do what. Maria listens patiently as they discuss problems and go off on tangents, but an hour later, the meeting ends without a clear path forward.  Activity 1  Think of a decision your team has to make: Write it here.  How do you currently guide your team in making decisions like this?  Research  Solving problems and making decisions as a team can be difficult. As we discussed earlier, when we’re at an impasse, focusing on the problem can make it difficult to consider alternative solutions and other perspectives. One way around this is to use a conversation tool called the CREATE Model® that encourages the group to widen their focus, often leading to an insight or new way of solving a problem, or at the very least a step toward making a decision. This acronym stands for “Current Reality,” “Explore Alternatives,” and “Thoughtfully Evaluate.” The steps of this three-part conversation tool enable a team to more objectively look at a problem, explore possible solutions with an open mind to help generate insight, and then design ways to evaluate possible decisions as a group to mitigate bias.  Current Reality is the part of the conversation where you encourage others to anchor on and discuss the facts. Here, you’re not asking about options or obstacles, but instead asking them to focus on what is objective. What this does is help to engage neural networks that represent the facts of the problem, like executive control areas or the prefrontal cortex, and away from areas that focus on the uncertainty of a solution, and the threat associated with that, like the limbic system.  \*This is a good place for an example of what good “Current reality questions” look like.   * “What are the known variables here?” * “Where are you now and where do you want to go?” * “What are the unknown variables?”   Exploring Alternatives is the next part of the conversation that prepares the brain for insight. By encouraging individuals to consider other options, they’re focusing away from how they’ve solved problems before and are more likely to tap into weaker or quieter neural pathways, a prerequisite for insights. The connections formed from enabling these pathways can help the group to come up with 2-5 potential solutions. Important here is to make sure not to anchor on any of them; the next part of the conversation will help to evaluate each of the alternatives.  \*This is a good place for an example of what good “Exploring alternatives questions” look like.   * “What have you tried in the past that’s worked?” * “What have you tried in the past that hasn’t worked?” * “Can you think of problems like this that you have been able to solve?”   The last step toward better team decisions is to Thoughtfully Evaluate. This step encourages the group to develop a process that evaluates the potential solutions. This will help the team objectively decide on the best option using agreed-upon criteria, which can be designed to mitigate potential biases that might sway decisions. As we’ve discussed previously, the brain uses mental shortcuts to help us make decisions efficiently, quickly and with the fewest resources, leaving us to make decisions sometimes without all of the information. This is no different in a group environment. In fact, sometimes within a group environment, social pressures such as group-think and the impact of power, can be an obstacle for some individuals to provide input. Setting clear processes ahead of time can help mitigate the impact of cognitive biases and social pressures.  \*This is a good place for an example of what “thoughtfully evaluate” looks like.   * What does success look like? * What are the advantages of this plan? * What could go wrong with this plan?   Activity 2  Think back to the decision in Activity 1.  Write down what you could say to walk your team through each step of CREATE:   * Current Reality: * Explore Alternatives: * Thoughtfully Evaluate:   ACTIVITIES TO CHOOSE FROM:   * If my team has to make a decision, then we’ll begin by discussing the current reality, without focusing on problems or solutions. * If my team has to make a decision, our second step will be exploring alternative solutions, settling on 2–5 options without anchoring on any. * If my team has to make a decision, our third step will be to develop a process that thoughtfully evaluates each option using agreed-upon criteria.   Maria’s story, take two:  As a result of recent government policy changes, Maria’s finance team has grown by a few project managers to help support new processes and increase efficiency. Now they need to decide how they’ll work together, which tasks each team member will own, and a clear plan forward. So Maria schedules a meeting at the beginning of the week. She knows that with a team of 15, the conversations could become inefficient and ineffective without some structure. She also realizes the most confident or loudest opinion might win instead of the best one, and other biases could come into play.  So Maria starts by outlining the policy shifts and then asks everyone to take 15 minutes immersed in the facts, without making any decisions yet. People share information about timelines, current processes, projects, and more. Everyone seems to stay in an overall toward state. Next, Maria suggests the team anchor on 2-5 alternatives for integrating the new team members, without choosing one. Finally, the team discusses a process for how to assess each option. In this stage of thoughtful evaluation, one option jumps out. The whole discussion took less than an hour, and everyone felt like they had a say. While there were debates and strong opinions, the best idea rose to the top — not just the loudest voice.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In "Skill 1: Improve Team Decisions (CREATE)," participants will learn to effectively navigate the complexities of team decision-making and problem-solving. The CREATE model introduces a structured three-phase approach to enhance collaborative decisions. This model encompasses:   * Current Reality: Understanding the present situation by identifying known and unknown variables, assessing the objective, and clarifying the vision for desired outcomes. * Explore Alternatives: Generating a wide range of solutions through brainstorming, encouraging outside-the-box thinking, and evaluating potential strategies without bias. * Thoughtfully Evaluate: Objectively assessing each alternative by considering the pros and cons, utilizing criteria to weigh options, and identifying potential biases that might cloud judgment.   By understanding the CREATE model, teams can make more informed, efficient, and impactful decisions. This approach not only optimizes problem-solving processes but also encourages a culture of thoughtful evaluation and continuous improvement. Theory CREATE is an acronym for three big phases of a problem-solving or decision-making conversation: Current Reality, Explore Alternatives, and Thoughtfully Evaluate. Application What are some tips to facilitate a meeting designed to solve a problem or make a decision as a group?  Meetings are great opportunities to do some thoughtful brainstorming. Unfortunately, a lot of meetings optimize only for quick consensus building. If people are talking, they aren’t engaged in quiet reflection. The better option: Allow people to process material quietly, capture their insights, and then discuss.  When using the CREATE model to solve a problem, what are some factors to consider when defining the current reality?   * Team numbers, experience, qualifications * Time * Physical resources * Budgets * History of project – past successes and failures * Status of project – how much work has already been done * Emotional status of the group (commitment, energy etc)   When using the CREATE model to solve a problem, what are some tips for brainstorming and exploring alternatives in a group setting?   * Prime people to think ‘outside the box’ and let them know that no ideas will be rejected at this stage. * Keep exploring alternatives at a high level, not going into each idea as it comes out. * Give people time to brainstorm individually then bring the group together to share ideas and generate more ideas. * Agree on a process to decide which ideas to go with. Consensus? Majority vote? Team leader’s call? Weighted criteria? * Use reappraisal questions to look at an issue from a different perspective. For example, ‘If you were on the board, or one of our shareholders, what would you do?’ * Focus on the actions being clearly defined and managing accountability within the team for delivery.   What are some questions I can ask to help my team solve a problem using the CREATE Model?  Current reality questions:  “What are the known variables here?”  “Where are you now and where do you want to go?”  “What are the unknown variables?”  What is our objective?  What is our vision?  What would we like the desired outcome to be?  How can we paint a picture of the ideal outcome of this issue?  What do we want to achieve here?  What is our goal?  What would success look like?  “What are the known variables here?”  “Where are you now and where do you want to go?”  “What are the unknown variables?”  How important is it that we resolve this, on a scale of 1 to 10?  How high is this in our priorities now, e.g. is it in your top 3, 5, or 10 priorities?  What priority should it be?  How motivated are you to resolve this topic?  How effective do you think our thinking has been so far?  How clear is our current thinking about this?  What stage are we at in our thinking about this?  What lens might we be looking through in our thinking?  What aspects of our thinking are most important/effective?  Can you see any gaps in our thinking?  What is our current level of threat?  Which domains of SCARF® have been triggered?  Explore alternatives questions:  “What have you tried in the past that’s worked?”  “What have you tried in the past that hasn’t worked?”  “Can you think of problems like this that you’ve been able to solve?”  What needs unpacking?  What connections are you making as you reflect on this?  What are we not thinking about that might help us find resolution?  What ideas/thoughts have crossed your mind about this that you may have dismissed?  What are our insights so far?  What themes are emerging?  How could we think about this more deeply?  What thoughts are going on in the back of your head as you talk about this issue?  What is your gut feeling about this?  How could we take our thinking to the next step?  What is the ratio of thinking we have done so far about the problem as compared to the solution?  What are some options based on this insight?  What are some of the alternatives for moving forward?  What are the milestones for achieving this goal?  What are the major steps you can see?  Thoughtfully evaluate questions  What planning do we need to implement to ensure success?  How might we start making a plan to move forward in this area?  How clear is our plan for achieving this objective?  Which biases could be clouding our thinking?  How can we assess the criteria?  How can we weigh the pros and cons? Blog posts **Try the magic of four**  We’ve thought about this question for years: what’s the optimal number of people around a table for an effective decision to be made? You want to retain the one-on-one element of focus, but also get an inclusive array of ideas. We think the optimal number is four.  Four people allows you to maximize attention, gather a good diversity of inputs and still have a personal touch. Research suggests that we have a cognitive capacity limit of three or four chunks of information that we can store and recall in our short-term as well as working memory. When there are only four faces in a virtual meeting, our brains are able to perceive each person distinctly and form sequential thoughts that help with learning and collaboration. Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Teams often rush into decision-making without fully understanding the current situation or considering all relevant factors, leading to suboptimal outcomes.  Solution 1: Utilize the "Current Reality" phase of the CREATE model to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Encourage the team to thoroughly assess known and unknown variables, define clear objectives, and establish a shared vision for desired outcomes, fostering a foundation for more informed decision-making.  Challenge 2: Teams may struggle with generating diverse and innovative solutions, often defaulting to familiar strategies that may not address the problem effectively.  Solution 3: In the "Explore Alternatives" phase, create an environment that encourages open brainstorming and outside-the-box thinking. Implement techniques such as silent brainstorming or role-playing different perspectives to stimulate creativity and ensure a broad range of alternatives are considered.  Challenge: Biases and personal preferences can cloud the objective evaluation of alternatives, leading to decisions that are not in the best interest of the team or project.  Solution 3: During the "Thoughtfully Evaluate" phase, apply an objective criteria-based approach to assess each alternative. Encourage the team to identify and discuss potential biases that could influence their judgment. Utilizing a structured evaluation process, such as scoring each option against predefined criteria, helps minimize the impact of biases and ensures a more objective decision-making process. FAQS  * How can we ensure that all team members fully understand the "Current Reality" before moving to explore alternatives? * What techniques can be used to stimulate creative and diverse thinking during the "Explore Alternatives" phase? * How do we set up an objective criteria-based evaluation process in the "Thoughtfully Evaluate" phase to minimize biases? * In what ways can we involve team members who are usually quiet or hesitant to contribute during the decision-making process? * How can we effectively handle disagreements or conflicts that arise when evaluating different alternatives? | |
| Habit 2: Solve problems fasterSkill 2: Check for bias (SEEDS) (F) Daiyu Hospital (white) 3, 6, 14, 19, 23 Nurse manager  [Maria’s Story]  Maria is having a problem with Brandon, one of her recently hired project managers. His previous finance experience seemed like a great fit for their team, but she’s finding that his personality isn’t. He seems to be always critically evaluating and pointing out flaws with everything, from new ideas to well-established team procedures. Group decisions take much longer than they used to. And a couple of people on her team have come to her and said Brandon makes them uncomfortable in meetings because he’s always challenging their ideas and seems to take nothing at face value. Besides his behavior in meetings, he just doesn’t seem to fit in socially with the rest of the team — he never joins in on discussions about last night’s sports game or the latest streaming series. Maria misses her old team where everyone got along and team dynamics just felt easier. She’s wondering if she made a mistake in hiring Brandon.  Research  There’s a reason why it doesn’t feel good to be challenged by other perspectives, or why we may feel uncomfortable when we feel others do not share the same interests or opinions. It stems from the way our brains process information and make rapid shortcut decisions. These cognitive biases don’t only get in the way of the way we make decisions, like hiring decisions, as we covered earlier, but they also impact how we feel around others.  As an evolved way to use fewer cognitive resources, we tend to make judgments about others more efficiently and quickly with the easiest-to-access and most frequently used information. Research has explored the ways our brains react when presented with information that triggers a cognitive bias. For instance, when we’re presented with information about an individual who is clearly different from us, this tends to make us feel uncomfortable and is associated with an engagement of the limbic and amygdala brain regions. These regions are often engaged when we notice a potential threat, which explains the feeling of discomfort and also why we tend to favor those who are like us.  NLI has simplified and categorized the many cognitive biases into our SEEDS™model, and the above is an example of a Similarity bias. Maria noted that Brandon did not have many similarities with her other team members and this added to her discomfort. The other biases experienced by her team were Expedience and Experience biases. The team was used to making decisions based on face value or without seeing all of the evidence, and also based on what they had done in the past. Being asked to take the time to rethink all of these decisions, or being challenged with another opinion, will engage areas of the brain that signal potential threat.  Activity 1: (Reflection activity)  How did you feel the last time someone publicly challenged your idea?  (word cloud)  Research  However, there’s a good reason for creating teams with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and skill sets. D[iverse teams](https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter) tend to make better team decisions and are more innovative. This is because each person will bring a different perspective to the table. In this type of challenging environment, teams are more likely to make decisions based on facts or with team-designed processes. The discomfort stems from the challenge of looking at information in new ways or being faced with an opinion that is not ours: It feels bad to be wrong.  We previously talked about challenging our assumptions when making decisions as an individual. Here’s how we can add onto this when checking for biases as a group. As a team leader, you can encourage the group to check for bias and mitigate its effects in the moment. You can also develop a team-built “if-then” plan ahead of time, as a preventative measure. Next time the team is working through a problem, start by labeling any biases that might influence the team’s thinking or cause you to make a quick choice without considering all the options. Then, you can encourage other perspectives to be voiced or shared and ensure that all perspectives are considered, whether they’re in the physical or virtual room. The more you make bias mitigation a team effort, the more likely you’ll make sound decisions.  Important to note here is that the benefits of a diverse team are dependent on individuals feeling comfortable or psychologically safe to voice their opinions or disagreements. As covered in the previous habit, psychological safety is the shared belief that people won’t be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. Only with this climate intact can teams effectively check for biases in their working environment.  ACTIVITY 2  Here are three situations. See if you can correctly label the primary bias found in each:   * As a manager, you find yourself giving the most challenging assignments to the employee who works with you in the office, rather than to remote employees. (DISTANCE) * You’d like to apply for a promotion at work, but you’re afraid of getting in over your head. Besides, your current position feels easy and comfortable. (SAFETY) * It’s 5 p.m. on a Friday, and you can’t wait to get out of the office. But then, a direct report comes to you with a problem. You ask her what she thinks she should do, and she offers one suggestion. You reply, “Yes, do that,” without really thinking about it. (EXPEDIENCE)   ACTIVITY 3  Which bias do you find your team defaulting to most often when working together?  (pie chart with 5 biases)  Write down a time when your team used this bias to make a decision. Did it end up being a good decision/what was the result?  (pie chart with yes/no/I don’t know yet; or type in answer if asking about the result)  ACTIVITIES TO CHOOSE FROM:  -If I’m hiring a new employee, then I won’t use “fit” with the existing team as a criterion for getting the job.  -If my team experiences friction in meetings, then I’ll ask myself whether it’s good friction that challenges ideas and assumptions.  -If my team is tempted to make a quick decision, then I’ll slow down and ask which biases might be coming into play.  Maria’s story, take two:  Maria is having a problem with Brandon, one of her recently hired project managers. His previous finance experience seemed like a great fit for their team, but she’s finding that his personality isn’t. He seems to be always critically evaluating and pointing out flaws with everything, from new ideas to well-established team procedures. Group decisions take much longer than they used to. And a couple of people on her team have come to her and said Brandon makes them uncomfortable in meetings because he’s always challenging their ideas and seems to take nothing at face value. Besides his behavior in meetings, he just doesn’t seem to fit in socially with the rest of the team — he never joins in on discussions about last night’s sports game or the latest streaming series.  Maria misses her old team where everyone got along and team dynamics just felt easier. But then she reminds herself of the times Brandon pointed out flaws in their thinking, saving them time and money. Maria also reflects how Brandon’s personality and interests seem different from the rest of the team, and she decides similarity bias is coming into play. She realizes nobody has really taken the time to get to know Brandon because they’ve been so put off by his challenging their ideas. So Maria starts the next team meeting with a relatedness exercise, asking everyone to share their favorite hobby. It turns out Brandon plays guitar, and he bonds with other members of the team over his love of music. Maria then spends the rest of the meeting reminding people how important it is to speak up and challenge ideas, and how diverse teams are less comfortable but make better decisions. Over time, Maria realizes that hiring Brandon was one of the best decisions she’s ever made.  **NILES content:** High-level overview In "Skill 2: Check for Bias," participants learn to navigate the landscape of team-based decision-making with a critical eye toward bias recognition and mitigation, employing the SEEDS Model® as a foundational framework. This skill emphasizes the universal presence of biases, advocating for a team-oriented approach to identify and address them effectively. By fostering an environment where bias discussion is normalized and integrated into regular team interactions, participants are equipped with strategies to enhance decision-making processes. The program highlights the importance of diverse perspectives, the assignment of roles such as devil’s advocate to counteract groupthink, and the implementation of structured methodologies to slow down decision-making, ensuring thorough evaluation of all options. Through practical applications and fostering a culture of openness and curiosity, teams are guided to reduce biases, leading to more inclusive outcomes and more objective decision-making. Theory It is easier to spot bias in others than in ourselves, which is why it is critical to make bias mitigation a team effort. This can be best facilitated when team members have a common understanding of bias and are able to normalize it; for example, attributing to the belief that “if you have a brain, you have bias.” It can also be facilitated when team members share a common language around how to communicate about bias when it shows up in group interactions. The SEEDS Model® provides a framework for discussing bias as a team.  A key challenge to overcome when making decisions as a team is groupthink. Groupthink may include the following features:   * People refrain from expressing doubt, suggesting alternatives, or asking questions. * The group reaches premature consensus. * Poor decisions might be made or rationalized. * Overly risk-averse decisions are made. * “Death by committee” - decisions are made slowly or not at all. * Groupthink is most likely in homogenous groups where people have similar perspectives, but it can happen in diverse groups as well, if people don't feel safe to speak up.   Types of bias that lead to groupthink:   * In-group bias drives our desire for harmony and cohesiveness, which is a type of Similarity bias. * Safety bias can come into play if certain members are reluctant to speak up or disagree with people more senior to them. * Conversely, groups sometimes make overly risky decisions due to a bias called the illusion of invulnerability – a type of Experience bias in which an inflated certainty leads people to be over-confident that the right decision has been made. * Groups can also fall prey to Expedience bias by racing to consensus – often because of having limited time together.  Application What are some principles and best practices to keep in mind when discussing bias in a team or group setting?   * Normalize discussing bias by making bias conversations a regular occurrence. * Use the SEEDS Model® to create a shared, neutral language. * Ask questions that invite discussion rather than tell people that they are being biased. For example, if you are tempted to say, “You have a biased point of view,” instead try saying, “Let’s pause to check for the influence of bias”. * Remember that as a leader you are a role model - so your behavior drives culture. * It is not possible to mitigate bias in every decision, so to get started, we suggest identifying key decisions, and discussing bias 2-3 times a week as a team.   How do I check for bias in a team or group setting without causing defensiveness?  To discuss Similarity bias as a team:   * If you are tempted to say, “You are favoring that person because you like them”, instead try asking, “Could this be Similarity Bias?” * If you are tempted to say, “The list of candidates is too homogenous”, instead try saying, “Perhaps we should consider some out-of-the box candidates”.   To discuss Expedience bias as a team:   * If you are tempted to say, “We are rushing this decision”, instead try saying, “Let's save time by taking a couple of minutes to share our ideas in the chat.” * If you are tempted to say, “You're pushing everyone to agree with you”, instead try saying, “Can I suggest we slow down and hear some dissenting views now?”   To discuss Experience bias as a team:   * If you are tempted to say, “You’re not valuing everyone’s input here, just those that agree with you, instead try saying, ““How can we ensure everyone’s voice is heard here?” * If you are tempted to say, “I think your view might be limited”, instead try saying, “ Have we explored all perspectives?”   To discuss Distance bias as a team:   * If you are tempted to say, “You’re being short-sighted”, instead try saying, “Let’s consider long term impacts as well.” * If you are tempted to say, “You’re overlooking remote workers, instead try saying, “Could distance bias be causing us to overlook remote workers?”   To discuss Safety bias as a team:   * If you are tempted to say, “We’re being too risk averse”, instead try saying, “Perhaps we could weigh opportunities against risks to mitigate Safety Bias”. * If you are tempted to say, “You have to cut your losses and let it go”, instead try saying, “The loss will be painful but is it the logical thing to do?”   How can I reduce “groupthink” when making decisions as a team?   * Seek diverse perspectives, for example, consciously assign diverse members to a working group, invite diverse voices into a meeting, send out a survey. * Assign a devil's advocate/provocateur/chief contrarian in each group. * Assign a meeting observer to assess the quality of the debate and the decision making process. * Slow down so you evaluate all data and inputs. * Encourage quiet voices to speak up, and encourage people not to self-censor. * Consider setting up a way for people to dissent anonymously so people feel safe. * Explicitly invite everyone to ask "stupid questions" and to challenge each other's ideas. * If a leader speaks last or is not present this can make it safer – even going off camera as the leader can help.   Question: How can I address it when someone else is being biased?  Answer: Bias is a sensitive subject because many people assume that being biased is a character flaw rather than a consequence of simply having a brain. It’s best not to directly accuse someone of engaging in biased thinking. Instead, speak in broader terms about how “our” thinking might be impacted by a particular bias:  You know, we are under so much time pressure, we probably have some expedience bias. Let’s slow down a little … Let’s make sure that we don’t fall victim to similarity bias when thinking about the best candidate for the job … Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Teams often default to quick consensus to avoid conflict, leading to groupthink and overlooking innovative solutions.   Solution 1: Implement a structured debate process where each member is encouraged to voice dissenting opinions. Assign a 'devil's advocate' role in meetings to ensure alternative perspectives are considered, fostering a culture of critical evaluation and diverse thinking.  Challenge 2: Unconscious biases may influence team decisions, leading to a lack of diversity in ideas and potential oversight of valuable contributions.   Solution 2: Conduct regular training sessions on the SEEDS Model® to raise awareness of common biases. Encourage team members to use a checklist of biases to review before making decisions, promoting objectivity and inclusivity in the decision-making process.  Challenge 3: Remote team members often feel excluded from decision-making processes, leading to diminished team cohesion and missed opportunities for valuable input.   Solution 3: Utilize digital tools to facilitate equal participation in decision-making, ensuring that remote members can contribute effectively. Establish clear guidelines that prioritize contributions from all team members, regardless of their physical location, to enhance inclusivity and leverage diverse perspectives. FAQS  * How can we recognize when groupthink is influencing our team's decision-making process? * What strategies can we use to mitigate the impact of unconscious biases during team discussions? * How can assigning a 'devil's advocate' role in meetings improve the quality of our decisions? * In what ways can the SEEDS Model® help us identify and address biases in our decision-making? * What are some effective ways to ensure remote team members are equally included in the decision-making process? | |
| Habit 2: Solve problems fasterSkill 3: Own the outcomes (NS of accountability) (F) Michelle Utility (African American) 1, 10, 15, 22, 24 Customer service  Michelle’s story: [Maria’s story]  Over the past few months, Maria has been working really hard to show she cares about her employees’ well-being and psychological safety. She’s asking how people are doing before jumping right into business, making sure everyone feels safe to speak up, and being lenient about adjusting deadlines when challenges arise. But lately it seems like nobody’s meeting their deadlines — including Maria. People always have good excuses or blame others, but it’s setting back the team’s progress. At her wits’ end, Maria sends out an email:  (show email on screen)  Hey Team,  Lately, people have been missing their deadlines for projects, and this is making it impossible for me to meet my deadlines. I may have been too lax lately, so from now on, there will be no excuses for missing a deadline.  -Maria  But the email doesn’t work the way Maria intended – people either keep missing deadlines, or they turn in work on time that’s sloppy and incomplete.  Research  Creating a team that embodies accountability is difficult, and despite the fact that it is considered a critical feature of successful teams, most managers and employees alike struggle to show it. Accountability is defined as the perceived expectation that our actions will be seen and evaluated by an audience (those who work around us), and any feedback, rewards, or consequences are based on this. A sense of responsibility is different: It is self-imposed and self-evaluated. In other words, accountability in your team means that they are meeting the organizational expectations, they are transparent and honest with you and others on the team and value meeting their obligations to each other, even if it means they accept responsibility for mistakes and engage in finding a solution, not blaming others for their mistakes.  One of the first challenges to creating accountability is changing the way that the concept is perceived. Often, the nature of accountability is thought to be punitive and defined as an environment where individuals see accountability with fear, blame or punishment. This acts as a perceived threat, creating an away state, and will hinder growth and learning within the organization. However, accountability that is viewed as an avenue for growth and development, encourages ownership and learning from mistakes. This type of empowered accountability creates a reward or towards-state in employees.  How we go from punitive to empowered accountability requires us to understand how these forms of accountability are different. Punitive accountability: When employees begin to blame others or fear being held accountable for mistakes, this stems from an environment lacking psychological safety and one that embraces a fixed mindset. Both of these place us in a state of perceived threat, limiting our ability to see solutions, diminishing our creativity, risk taking and damaging team cohesion, morale and loyalty. Empowered accountability: However, when leaders work to create an environment of psychological safety and instill a growth mindset, this helps the team become more effective, efficient and innovative. This will create a culture of trust and teams will become more collaborative and engaged.  We’ve worked to understand and create an environment of psychological safety (Habit 1 of this Module) and have instilled a growth mindset in our direct reports (Module 2), so this should foster the actions that are needed for empowered accountability:  Think ahead - Here is where we create a picture in our minds of the task and potential outcomes. This uses the science of mentalizing or imagery, and engages a set of brain regions, like the premotor cortex. It is similar to what happens when we create implementation intentions or if-then plans, and creates what’s called a prospective memory. You are able to imagine the scenario and consider all outcomes, setting multiple expectations, and this will help react well to the eventual outcomes, if we have already prepared for them. As a leader, it’s especially important to imagine how people might get confused when sharing your expectations, so create a lot of clarity when communicating this to your team.  Obsess about commitments - Here is where we make sure we meet or exceed the expectations. The importance of this stems from how sensitive we are to expectations not being met. This is studied as a prediction error signal between an expectation and the actual outcome. If expectations of another is not met, this results in a dramatic drop in dopaminergic signaling in midbrain neurons, leading to feelings of disappointment, frustration or anger towards this person. The opposite of this occurs when expectations are met or are exceeded: these same neurons release dopamine, driving a sense of reward and building a sense of trust. Thus, tracking and fulfilling promises and commitments is just as important for leaders to role model as it is for teams to value.  Own the outcome - Finally, one of the most difficult things to action as a leader and direct report is taking ownership of and finding solutions to mistakes. This requires leaders to embrace a growth mindset and role model humility to the team. This will help the team become more resourceful and creative when finding solutions, versus blaming others. The benefits of humility and a growth mindset are the ability to own one’s mistakes (as well as successes), and learn from those mistakes as we move forward. Leaders that work to create a sense of psychological safety will help their team to share  Activity 1:  xxx  Activity 2:  xxx  ACTIVITIES TO CHOOSE FROM:  Michelle’s story, take two:  Over the past few months, Maria has been working really hard to show she cares about her employees’ well-being and psychological safety. She’s asking how people are doing before jumping right into business, making sure everyone feels safe to speak up, and being lenient about adjusting deadlines when challenges arise. But lately it seems like nobody’s meeting their deadlines — including Maria. People always have good excuses, but it’s setting back the team’s progress.  So Maria calls a team meeting. First, she apologizes for missing some of her own recent deadlines and says she’s going to work hard to make sure it doesn’t happen again. Then, she asks the group why they think people might be having trouble with deadlines. Maria learns that because of the recent government policy changes, it’s taking longer for people to get their work done as they adjust to new procedures. Also, she learns they often don’t have clarity about what to do when obstacles arise. With this valuable information, Maria formulates a plan:  (show her writing on a page or typing on a computer screen the following):   * Give extra time on tasks for the next few weeks while people learn new procedures * Anticipate problems and help employees have insights about how to solve them before they arise * Leverage social pressure by asking team members to report on progress during weekly meetings   With these changes, missed deadlines are rare instead of commonplace.  **NILES Content:** High-level overview For Skill 3: Own the Outcomes, focusing on the neuroscience of accountability, participants will learn how to foster a culture of empowerment over surveillance, emphasizing autonomy and clarity in job expectations. This skill development involves embracing a growth mindset, where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning and development rather than reasons for punitive action. Through this module, leaders will discover how to set clear expectations, effectively communicate the vision of what great performance looks like, and provide support to team members to encourage ownership of outcomes.  Participants will engage in practical exercises to role-model accountability, initiate constructive conversations around learning from mistakes, and apply strategies to enhance trust and performance within their teams. The goal is to shift focus from monitoring to empowering, ensuring that employees have the autonomy to perform their roles effectively while aligning their efforts with the organization's objectives. By the end of this module, participants will be equipped to create an environment where accountability is associated with growth, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Theory One of the most effective ways to create trust and increase performance is to shift from a surveillance focus to an outcomes focus. For example, managers can clearly articulate what great performance looks like so that employees have clarity around what they can aspire to. In the process, managers can allow employees autonomy in how they will perform their job. Research has shown that when employees feel they have autonomy, they are more satisfied with their work and more committed to their organizations. Another Application How can I create a culture where people feel safe to take accountability for mistakes?  Creating a growth mindset culture is key. To “take the stakes out of mistakes”, consider adding a regular item on the monthly team agenda called “mistake of the month” - a competition for who made the biggest mistake and more importantly, what they learned as a result. As a leader, you should role-model winning this competition often, encourage others to compete, and celebrate when they share honestly and openly. Tips are to give advance warning, and to encourage people to start with small mistakes to build muscle and confidence.  How can I have a conversation with my direct report with a focus on accountability and debriefing what they learned from a mistake?   * If you are tempted to ask, “What went wrong?”, instead try asking, “What did you learn?”. * If you are tempted to say, “You need to fix this”, instead try asking, “What ideas do you have to fix this?” * If you are tempted to say, “I don’t want to see this mistake again”, instead try asking, “How might you improve this next time?” * If you are tempted to say, “I hope you continue to apply this new learning”, instead try asking, “How will you continue to apply this new learning? * If you are tempted to say, “Let’s not have this conversation again”, instead try saying, “Let’s check in on your progress by X date”. * If you are tempted to say, “You are not delivering on X”, instead try saying, “Let’s brainstorm solutions to X.” * If you are tempted to ask, “Why is this a problem?”, instead try saying, “Let’s explore some possible solutions”. * If you are tempted to ask, “Why did you do X?” instead try asking, “What were your goals when you did X?” * If you are tempted to say, “You need to be back on track by X date”, instead ask, “By what date can you commit to getting back on track?” * If you are tempted to say, “Here’s what I hope you’ve learned”, instead ask, “What have you learned so far?” * If you are tempted to say, “You could be performing better”, instead ask, “What roadblocks are you facing?” * If you are tempted to say, “I assume you know what to do”, instead ask, “How can I support you?”   What are some conversational phrases and questions to help people learn from mistakes?   * This conversation might be a bit challenging for both of us. Let’s stay focused on finding solutions to move forward. * Let’s not get caught in the details but focus instead on outcomes and important insights. * I have a sense you’ve been struggling with [X]. How can I best help you? * What are you already thinking about to help you be more successful in this area? * What are your key learnings that will help you complete your upcoming projects/goals successfully? * Let’s work together to come up with some ideas to get back on track. * What specific steps can you commit to in order to make sure you meet this deadline/deliverable? * Can I share a couple of suggestions? Tell me if any of these resonate with you. * I’m here to support you. Let’s check in on your progress next week. What day works best for you?  Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Employees may resist taking accountability for outcomes, fearing repercussions for mistakes. This fear can inhibit innovation and willingness to take on new challenges, leading to a culture of risk-aversion and stagnation.  Solution 1: Cultivate a growth mindset culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. Implement a "mistake of the month" initiative to celebrate learnings from errors, demonstrating leadership's commitment to growth from failure. Encourage open discussions about setbacks and the lessons learned, reinforcing that accountability is about improvement, not punishment.  Challenge 2: Managers might struggle to balance giving autonomy with ensuring accountability, leading to either micromanagement or too much hands-off, which can result in confusion and misalignment with organizational goals.  Solution 2: Clearly articulate what great performance looks like and provide autonomy on how to achieve it. Set clear, measurable expectations and regular check-ins to discuss progress, offer support, and adjust strategies as needed. This approach ensures that employees understand what they are accountable for and feel supported in achieving their objectives.  Challenge 3: Creating a safe space for employees to take accountability for outcomes, especially in a highly competitive or punitive environment where mistakes are traditionally met with negative consequences.  Solution 3: Shift from a focus on punitive accountability to empowerment by emphasizing the importance of learning from mistakes. Facilitate conversations that focus on what was learned from an error rather than who was at fault. Provide constructive feedback that is specific, actionable, and focused on future improvement strategies. By modeling this behavior, leaders can foster a more open, trusting environment that encourages taking ownership of outcomes. FAQS  * How can we create a culture where employees feel safe to take accountability for their mistakes? * What strategies can be implemented to balance autonomy with accountability effectively? * In what ways can managers articulate clear expectations of great performance to their team members? * How can regular check-ins be structured to support employees in achieving their objectives while maintaining accountability? * What are some effective methods to transition from punitive accountability to a focus on empowerment and learning from mistakes? | |
| Habit 3: Stay agileSkill 1: Build the right routines (M) Javier Technology (Hispanic) 4, 7, 12, 18, 25 Technology/coding  Michelle’s story:  For all the coaching Michelle does for her team to help them work smarter and not harder, she has yet to really find a routine that works for her. Some mornings, she’s able to focus on deep thinking, while others, she can barely find time to use the restroom between calls. She wants to make himself available to her team but also is having trouble putting up boundaries so she can get her work done. Often, at the end of a day, she’s facing two to three hours of work at night to catch up — something she knows isn’t sustainable.  Research  Building the right routines for a creative and productive day, for yourself and your team, requires an understanding of our own cognitive capacity, the ways we work best and how forming habits can work with the limits of our capacity. One of the concepts we learned in the beginning of this journey is that of our cognitive capacity: we have a limit to the amount of information we can hold in our mind at any given moment and our ability to use this information is limited over time. One of the ways we can work within the limits of our capacity is to prioritize how we structure or architect our day, and design ways to integrate times of rest: for our mind and body. We know from the research used to design the Healthy Mind Platter that creativity and cognitive performance during focus time is fostered by ensuring that portions from the full platter are integrated into our days. For example, for many of us, the mornings may be the time of day that we can focus our attention the best. If we are able to prioritize this type of work, without meeting interruptions during this period, we are leveraging our own personal cognitive design to get our work done.  Activity 1:  xxx  Once you find the optimal routine, the next step is developing a set of habits around it. The reason behind developing habits is because habits are behaviors we default to, especially when other pressures and stress levels increase. They are the set of behaviors that take the least amount of cognitive effort    Brain-friendly insights for structuring your day   * To get the most out of your brain, leave your mornings open for focused work or creative work. Think of this as “minimal meeting mornings.” Ideally, do your own quiet work before you check emails or the outside world at all. This gives you the best chance of having deeper insights, as well as high-quality focus. * When having meetings, schedule them as 15, 25, or 50 minutes. This way, you have space for your brain to reset. While you might not stick to this all the time, it’s a principle, not a rule, and it will make a difference most of the time. * After lunch is a good time to talk to a human, when you won’t focus on detailed work so well anyway. * Prioritizing is critical to do daily, but it can be taxing on the brain. Do your prioritizing for the next day at the end of your current day so that you start the day focused and clear on what you have to do, saving your brain for deeper thinking.   Brain-friendly insights for structuring your week   * As well as “minimal meeting mornings,” try “minimal meeting Mondays” (or whenever your first day back at work after a break is). You will likely do your best creative and focused work after a rest on the weekend. Rather than use this great resource on meetings, use this time to get your own work done. As a manager, it is likely you can create this habit, and minimal meeting mornings, across the team, which will help everyone be more productive. * Context switching is tiring. Try blocking larger amounts of time on one specific project, such as half a day or a full day. Making someone a priority for everyone all at the same time can move a project along much faster. Remember how we all set up work from home in just a week or two when the pandemic hit — because it was a priority for everyone all at once. * Think about the people on your team you need to support more regularly, for example a new employee or someone working on a new project. To help them focus, consider setting priorities for the week together on a Monday and debriefing even digitally on Friday. Be careful of asking people to report on everything they did — this is more of a surveillance mindset. Focus on the big things they achieved and anything they need help with, as you learned about check-in conversations.   Brain-friendly insights for structuring your month   * If you manage people, you probably should have a check-in of some sort at least monthly. If you have a large team, perhaps 10-20 reports, you might do this digitally every second month and in real time otherwise. Making sure this is in your calendar ahead of time is a system for ensuring good ongoing communication. * Consider a team reflection time once a month where you share your learnings and generally reconnect around learning, insights, and growth itself. It can be as short as 15 or 25 minutes. This would be independent of a regular interaction where you talk about the details of the work — it’s lifting back up to vision and plan, and out of the details, identifying progress, celebrating successes, and looking at additional habits that might be needed at a team level going forward.   Brain-friendly insights for structuring your quarter, half, or year   * If a number of people work fully remotely, is there an opportunity each quarter to perhaps come together in person? Or at least twice a year or, at the very least, once a year? Being together has upsides, including engagement and retention, and while we don’t want to force people into this, it can be a big help to come together now and then. * Is there an opportunity every quarter, half, or year to take a block of time off the day-to-day work and work as a team on the team itself and on higher-order issues such as your strategy or processes. Scheduling in reflection time is perhaps the only way we get these deeper insights, as day-to-day work always takes over otherwise.   Michelle’s story, take two:  For all the coaching Javier does for his team to help them work smarter and not harder, he has yet to really find a routine that works for him. Some mornings, he’s able to focus on deep thinking, while others, he can barely find time to use the restroom between calls. Recognizing he’s not setting himself up for success, he begins to implement a few boundaries. He starts by blocking his calendar every Monday morning from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. so he can get some quality work done. He does the same thing for Friday mornings. He also emails his team and changes his one-on-one weekly calls to bi-weekly and then sets up a team office hour, where he’s available every Thursday to answer any pressing questions. Finally, he asks his manager for two things: for their catch-up to be a walking meeting so he can step away from the computer on a regular basis and to ask if there’s money in the budget to bring his team together twice a year in person to work on larger strategies. Within a few weeks of trying this new routine, he realizes he gets much more work done — and realizes that his team is working better with the added time they’ve gotten back as well.  **NILES content:** High-level overview For Skill 1: Build the Right Routines, participants will explore the science of optimizing daily routines to leverage cognitive capacities effectively. This module empowers individuals and teams to categorize tasks based on cognitive demand—ranging from low-effort, routine tasks to high-effort, creative challenges. By understanding and applying principles of cognitive load management, participants will learn to align tasks with their peak cognitive periods, thereby enhancing productivity, efficiency, and well-being.  The training emphasizes the importance of scheduling and routine building, guiding participants on how to prioritize tasks from simple to complex throughout their day to match their cognitive energy levels. Through practical exercises, participants will develop personalized strategies for task allocation that maximizes their focus and creative output, while minimizing cognitive fatigue.  The goal is to foster an environment where both individuals and teams can thrive by optimizing their work processes according to cognitive science principles. By the end of this module, participants will be equipped with the tools to establish routines that support sustained high performance and agility, ensuring that they and their teams can adapt and excel in dynamic work environments. Theory We can divide tasks into three degrees of cognitive difficulty.  Level 1 tasks don’t require much thinking or effort, and use of the PFC is minimal. They tend to utilize concepts or skills that are familiar to us. An example might be responding to an email request for information that you can easily bring to mind. The answer would be something straightforward, like the location of a document or the correct procedure for filing expenses. Current projects often fall into this “easy” category because information about them is stored in our short-term memory and is highly accessible.  Level 2 tasks represent the next degree of difficulty. An example could be writing an email to a colleague summarizing key points from a meeting they missed. Let’s say you only took notes about the aspects of the meeting relevant to you, but now you need to consider what might have been relevant to your colleague. To complete this task, you need to think about the recent past, engaging your working memory, and you need to navigate a certain level of ambiguity: Which key points does your colleague need to know?  Level 3 tasks deplete our cognitive resources the fastest. Think of activities that “start from a blank page.” They may involve imagining the future, creating, conceptualizing, abstract thinking, and/or a high degree of uncertainty. For example, reimagining the organizational structure for a company or writing an article for publication. Application What are some strategies to schedule my day or create routines that maximize my cognitive capacity?  Maximize your cognitive primetime  Because our brains prefer to conserve energy, we tend to gravitate toward level 1 tasks. These “quick and easy” activities give us a feeling of instant gratification. Unfortunately, doing these activities early in our workday can use up precious cognitive resources that we need for more important and challenging thinking tasks. This pattern often leads to an unproductive day.  Try mapping your typical peaks and troughs in energy throughout the day. Next, assign a level of difficulty to each of the activities you want to complete from level 1 to level 3 of cognitive difficulty. From there, you can thoughtfully map tasks against times of day. Blog posts Help your employees maximize their cognitive capacity. Some strategies:   * Schedule frequent breaks and actually follow through (ditto for vacations) * Institute “speedy meetings” and put Parkinson’s Law to work—while you relax * Provide options for flexible and remote work approaches * Practice optimal inclusion to decrease inefficiency and conserve others’ time * Unplug completely at day’s end to decrease stress after hours * Leverage technology to work more efficiently * Carve out quiet reflection time at the end of team meetings  Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Employees often struggle to recognize their own times of peak cognitive performance, leading to inefficient task scheduling and decreased productivity.  Solution 1: Encourage employees to track their energy and focus levels over a period to identify patterns. Provide tools or workshops on self-awareness and time management to help them align tasks with their cognitive peaks.  Challenge 2: Individuals may resist altering their established work habits, even if these are not aligned with optimal cognitive performance times, due to comfort with the status quo.  Solution 2: Implement gradual changes and provide clear evidence of the benefits of aligning tasks with cognitive energy levels. Offer coaching and support through the transition period to ease the adjustment to new routines.  Challenge 3: Teams may find it challenging to synchronize as members have different periods of peak cognitive performance, complicating collaborative efforts and meetings scheduling.  Solution 3: Foster a culture of flexibility and open communication where team members can share their peak times. Use this information to plan collaborative work and meetings during overlapping peak periods, or when most members are likely to be at their cognitive best, while allowing for asynchronous work during other times. FAQS  * How can I identify my peak cognitive performance times during the day? * What strategies can I use to adjust my daily routine to better match my cognitive energy levels? * How can we align team tasks and meetings with each member's peak cognitive times without compromising collaboration? * What tools or methods can help track and analyze my productivity patterns to optimize my routine? * In a team setting, how do we manage differences in peak cognitive times to ensure efficient and effective collaboration? | |
| Habit 3: Stay agileSkill 2: Smooth out conflict (SCARF, CALM) (M) Chayton Government (Filipino) 2, 9, 13, 16, 20, 26 Finance  Michelle’s story:  Michelle: Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining the update on the new technology regarding our quarterly reports. I know leadership is very excited to see our progress. Where do we stand?  Mark: We’re killing it! We’ve worked on the UX, the security aspects, and we have a few new templates for different report styles to show. It’s awesome!  Mihali: I think that’s a bit of a generous project update. From where I sit, we’re behind on the template designs, and I’m not sure we’ll be able to have the demo ready in a week for leadership.  Mark: What are you talking about? I’ve been busting my butt to get things ready. I’ve been waiting on that design from your team for ages now.  Mihali: Maybe if you actually gave us explicit instructions, we wouldn’t have had to redo it two times.  Michelle: Okay, folks, let’s simmer down. No need to raise voices. Something is clearly going on with you both, so let’s discuss this at a later time.  Research  Michelle’s story, take two:  Michelle: Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining the update on the new technology regarding our quarterly reports. I know leadership is very excited to see our progress. Where do we stand?  Mark: We’re killing it! We’ve worked on the UX, the security aspects, and we have a few new templates for different report styles to show. It’s awesome!  Mihali: I think that’s a bit of a generous project update. From where I sit, we’re behind on the template designs, and I’m not sure we’ll be able to have the demo ready in a week for leadership.  Michelle: Okay, so it seems there’s a bit of disagreement over how things are going, which is totally normal. Look, this is a tough thing we’re doing here: trying to reimagine and break the mold of a very long way of churning out quarterly reports. That’s no small feat, and it takes high-quality work from everyone — including the great work both Mark and Mihali are doing — to get there. And we’re going to have to debate productively in order to really succeed.  Mark and Mihali, I understand and appreciate both your viewpoints. How about we let this sit for 24 hours and come back to it?  The next day, Michelle sits down with them both and discovers, as so often is the case, that there was a misunderstanding that was exacerbated by intense emotions in a public setting. By talking through what happened and realizing they both want to get the project done, they put the conflict aside and get back to work.  **NILES content:** High-level overview For Skill 2: Smooth Out Conflict, participants will learn effective strategies for de-escalating tension and resolving conflicts within teams using the SCARF® model. This skill development centers on understanding the psychological underpinnings of conflict and employs neuroscience-based techniques to reduce threat perceptions and foster collaborative resolutions. Through this module, participants will master the art of identifying and addressing the sources of conflict by recognizing the triggers in themselves and others and applying targeted strategies to mitigate these triggers.  Participants will be equipped with practical tools to pause and reflect on their own emotional state, interpret the core issues at play using the SCARF® model, and employ tactics to send positive social signals that de-escalate tensions. This approach not only aims to smooth out conflicts but also to transform potentially divisive situations into opportunities for fostering deeper understanding and stronger connections within teams.  By the end of this module, participants will have developed the skills to approach conflicts with confidence, and to navigate disputes thoughtfully and effectively. They will be prepared to handle tense conversations with empathy and insight, ensuring that conflicts are resolved in a way that enhances team cohesion and maintains a focus on shared goals and outcomes. Theory The SCARF® Model is particularly relevant when approaching social conflict, since people vary in the types of threats/rewards that are most salient to them.  De-escalating someone in a heightened threat state isn’t always easy and doesn’t come naturally. Since our default response is to defend ourselves, inserting ourselves into conflict takes a focused effort to overcome our natural, and often subconscious reaction. Our first step should be to label our level of threat (1, 2, or 3) as away to regulate our own emotion.  Our next step is to determine the source of conflict with others by using SCARF to identify which domains might be in threat. Effective de-escalation culminates with sending appropriate reward signals in order to diminish the threat response in others. These signals, which may include verbal, micro-behaviors, and/or gestures, are all found within domains of the SCARF® model. If used appropriately, these positive signals can reduce an individual’s threat response. In fact, you can send rewards that target more than one domain and people will respond even more positively. This is called the multiplier effect. For example, if you send a status and a certainty signal, the reward is greater.  De-escalation in the workplace is defined as: Reduce strong emotions, tensions, or aggressions to a manageable or productive state.  Conventional wisdom says: When people are agitated, it’s you not me. Research says: When people are agitated, it’s you and me.  Ref: Richards, K. J. (2007). De-escalation techniques. In M. T. Compton and R. J. Kotwicki (Eds.), Responding to individuals with mental illnesses (pp. 160–174). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Inc.  Lowering threat response: “The act of moving from a state of high tension to a state of reduced tension” Application What are some tips for de-escalating a tense conversation or situation?  At the beginning of a tense situation, start by noticing the moment, pausing and reflecting, and labeling your own threat level. Here are some further tips:  Do less: Focus only on their agitation; do more: Notice you are both agitated  Do less: Respond immediately; do more: Take a pause  Do less: Have a general awareness you are in threat; do more: Label your threat at level 1, 2 or 3  During a tense conversation, use the SCARF Model® to interpret what’s at the core of the issue:  Do less: Focus on their words only; do more: Focus on both words and non-verbal cues.  Do less: Notice only one person’s SCARF® triggers; do more: Notice your own SCARF® triggers and theirs.  Do less: Focus only on the issue at hand; do more: Consider the wider context and environment  To defuse a conflict, use the SCARF Model® to send positive social signals that stop the cycle of escalation:  Status   * Do less: Try to prove your point; do more: Acknowledge their point-of-view   Certainty   * Do less: Assume they understand; do more: Check if they need something clarified.   Autonomy   * Do less: Tell them what to do; do more: Provide options and choices.   Relatedness   * Do less: Focus only on the issue; do more: Connect with the person.   Fairness   * Do less: Refer to the official policy; do more: Explain the reasons behind decisions.   What are some tips or strategies to manage my own responses and reactions during a tense situation?  Level 1 Threats:   * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “I’m busy, I don’t have time for this”, instead say to yourself: “Maybe I’m feeling some threat.” * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “I’m fine, let’s sort this out”, instead consider saying to yourself, “I think I’m at a level one.” * If you are tempted to think, “I can handle this, it’s nothing”, instead consider: “This is a good time to pay attention.”   Level 2 Threats   * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “I’m just going to deal with this problem”, instead say to yourself, “I’ll pause to notice my threat level.” * If you are tempted to think, “This is bad, but I can push through”, instead notice: “I’m feeling flustered, I’m at a level two.” * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “It’s not me that has the problem!” instead notice, “We are both agitated.”   Level 3 Threats   * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “I need to deal with this right now”, instead say, “I’m overwhelmed, I need to reset.” * If you are tempted to say, “This person is totally unreasonable”, consider the possibility “We’re both at level three”. * If you are tempted to say, “I’m furious, can we just move on?” instead say, “I can’t process this, I need to step back”.   What are some strategies to interpret the source of conflict?  Status   * If you are tempted to think, “How dare they talk to me like that?”, consider interpreting the situation as, “I’m feeling disrespected.” * If you are tempted to assume: “They think it’s all about them”, instead consider the possibility “They might be feeling undervalued.”   Certainty   * If you are tempted to think, “The person is making zero sense”, instead consider the reframe: “I need more clarity.” * If you are tempted to think, “They’re asking too many questions”, instead consider that they may need more information.   Autonomy   * If you are tempted to think, “I can’t let them take over”, instead consider the interpretation: “I feel the need to regain control.” * If you are tempted to think, “They don’t get it - there’s no choice”, instead try reinterpreting the situation as, “ They want to feel that they have options.”   Relatedness   * If you are tempted to believe: “We fundamentally disagree”, instead reframe it as, “We have different life experiences”. * If you are tempted to think, “They are so combative”, instead consider that “They might feel that I’m against them.”   Fairness   * If you are tempted to ask yourself, “Why is this my problem to deal with? “ try noticing, “This is a “Fairness trigger” for me.” * If you are tempted to say to yourself, “They just need to stop arguing”, instead remind yourself that “ They just want to feel fairly treated”.   What are some phrases I can use to defuse conflict in a tense situation or conversation?  At the beginning of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to say, “There really is no problem here”, instead try saying, “Tell me about your concerns.” * If you are tempted to say, “It’s against policy, I can’t help you”, instead try saying, “Would it be useful if I explain [X]?” * If you are tempted to say, “Let’s clear this up quickly”, instead try saying, “I’d like to understand your perspective.”   In the middle of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to say, “You are overreacting”, instead try saying, “Your frustrations are valid.” * If you are tempted to say, “Can we just move on?”, instead try saying, “What outcome do you want to see?” * If you are tempted to say, “You are looking at this the wrong way, instead try saying, “I’d like to reach an understanding.”   At the end of the conversation:   * If you are tempted to say, “That’s my final decision”, instead try saying, “The reason for my decision is [X].” * If you are tempted to say, “This is the only option I can give you”, instead try saying, “Would you prefer [X] or [Y]?” * If you are tempted to say, “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing I can do”, instead try saying, “I’m sorry, I know this must feel unfair.”   What are some examples of if-then plans for dealing with conflict?   * If I am in a difficult situation, then I will label threats and send positive signals with SCARF®. * When I am tempted to argue my point, then I will pause and listen instead. * If the other person is agitated, then I will adopt a relaxed posture. * If a conversation went badly, then I will use SCARF® to understand why.   What’s the best way to practice de-escalation so I am better prepared?  Practicing in a simulation-like situation (i.e. role play) is helpful. Research shows that when representing emotionally salient experiences during the practice, it will increase the engagement of the planned behaviors (or outcomes) and this makes the practice more plausible. Role-plays and simulations also provide the opportunity for feedback from peers, which fosters learning.  Another way to practice is through visualization, also known as mental imagery (for example, replaying a television conflict in your head and imagining how you might respond). Visualization activates the same neural networks that are activated during the real behavior, as well as networks that are important for emotional experience. By engaging in this kind of technique, you will be stimulating these same networks, and strengthening the connections, which together we call a schema. This schema is then easier to call upon in a real-life situation and doesn’t use as many cognitive resources, which you may not have access to in a high-pressure or high threat context.  Does SCARF® vary due to different cultural backgrounds? Should I change my de-escalation approach based on this?  While human culture is diverse, the brain’s sensitivity to social threats and rewards appears to be universal. Culture does cause variations, for example, what is considered unfair in one culture might be normal in another. However, there is usually greater variation within a culture than across cultures. Identifying cultural themes or patterns can be helpful in the absence of other information, but it can also lead to stereotyping; a form of unconscious bias. Generally, better results are achieved when we interact with each person as an individual, by asking questions, listening, and observing.  How do I de-escalate a group of people who seem to have a hive-mind or are falling prey to groupthink?  Due to the contagion effect and what we know of group dynamics, if de-escalation does not appear successful initially, it may be best to separate the individuals within the group. This has been shown to be effective in large group conflict. If the conflict begins to escalate, it has been shown that “collective and coordinated group intervention is more likely to lead to nonviolent outcomes than repeated actions from the same individual.” So for larger groups, if possible, use more than one mediator with the same message.  How can I engage productively with someone when I fundamentally disagree with their beliefs, or when they say the underlying issue is cultural?  The domains triggered in this type of escalation are typically status, (Do you value my opinion?) and  relatedness (Do we understand each other?). In the case of a cultural issue the triggered domain may also be fairness, (Are you treating me differently because of my identity?).  If you can, send a reward signal in the domains that are under threat for the other person. Remind yourself that their need to be understood is as strong as yours – seek to understand their perspective by asking questions.  Try to find some common ground outside of cultural identity, perhaps in the form of a shared goal. Sending SCARF® rewards in non-triggered domains is also helpful, so consider how you can positively signal certainty and autonomy as well.  What can I do if I find myself in a situation where someone becomes aggressive?  If you feel you are at risk of being hurt, step away. If you choose to stay, try to be calm and solutions-focused. For example, you can say, “I honestly think we are not going to find a resolution in this kind of state. I can see we’re not making progress, and I don’t want to make the situation worse. I think we should walk away and come back another day.”  What are some ways to de-escalate conflict in a digital space / online?  Even in a digital space, the domains of SCARF® and perception of threat levels remain. To send positive SCARF® signals in an audio-visual setting, practice making eye contact with the camera, and focus on your tone of voice and facial expressions. In a written forum, carefully review your statements and try to take perspective as to how it might be received by the other person. It can also be helpful to have someone check your response before clicking ‘send’.  How do I stay calm during escalation?  The first step in stopping the cycle of escalation and beginning successful de- escalation is to label your threat level. Labeling one form of emotional regulation, and research has shown that using this strategy reduces the intensity of the threat. For the brain, this means that labeling can shift the balance of the brain’s energy resources away from the amygdala and other limbic areas and bring the energy back to the PFC. So re-engaging your PFC will allow you to regain cognitive control.  How do I better understand what is motivating other people during a conflict?  The SCARF® Model is particularly relevant when approaching social conflict, since people vary in the types of threats/rewards that are most salient to them. Being able to identify the domains that are most important—i.e., most likely to trigger either a threat or a reward state—to the people you are interacting with is one way to effectively reduce social conflict.  What are the steps to defuse conflict?  Understanding the five domains that can trigger threat and reward signals in the brain is only useful if that knowledge is put into action. But de-escalating someone in a heightened threat state isn’t always easy and doesn’t come naturally. Since our default response is to defend ourselves, inserting ourselves into conflict takes a focused effort to overcome our natural, and often subconscious reaction. If we could work to lessen our nervousness upon approaching a situation, it would help us become more effective.  After evaluating the cause of our threat and determining the source of conflict with others, choosing an appropriate response can act to defuse the conflict.  Effective de-escalation culminates with sending appropriate reward signals in order to diminish the threat response in others. These signals, which may include verbal, micro-behaviors, and/or gestures, are all found within domains of the SCARF® model. If used appropriately, these positive signals can reduce an individual’s threat response. In fact, you can send rewards that target more than one domain and people will respond even more positively. This is called the multiplier effect. For example, if you send a status and a certainty signal, the reward is greater.  I understand how to de-escalate conflict but I feel nervous about doing it. What should I do?  Effective de-escalation takes practice. Every social conflict brings an almost unpredictable set of threats and SCARF® domains to identify. In order to build the confidence needed to effectively interpret the environment and quickly cool conflict, consistent practice across a wide variety of scenarios will ensure our efforts to defuse don’t accidentally fan the flames of conflict in the future.  Practicing de-escalation can come in the form of deliberate simulation practice,, as well as a form of practice called mental imagery. These kinds of practice strategies are especially helpful when approaching stressful or difficult situations. What makes both forms of practice so effective is that they help to solidify and strengthen networks of connections in our brain, creating long-term memories which are able to be quickly retrieved without adding to cognitive load. Sometimes referred to as schemas, these mental maps exist for actions, behaviors, and events—and the stronger they are, the easier they are to retrieve.  Similar to a novice driver who is nervous behind the wheel and unable to multi- task until continuous driving in multiple settings makes driving second-nature, de-escalation practice requires consistent attention in order to help solidify a wide variety of schemas. As they become more numerous and easier to access, simple environmental triggers can act as primers to illuminate the potential threats to defuse before they escalate further. Essentially, practicing de-escalation by imagining tense conversations playing out—even if you’re imagining it while watching a conflict on television or observing one in a public setting—can help you build schemas for later use.  As you embark on this journey, it’s important to recognize your progress. Remember that–just like the novice driver–effective de-escalation may not be easy in the beginning. However, embracing a mindset that encourages personal improvement over time, and values feedback and mistakes as opportunities to learn will actually lead to greater performance as a result. If you find yourself thinking that you are “just not great at de-escalation,” consider reframing that thought to “just not great at de-escalation, yet.” Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Team members often react defensively during conflicts, escalating tensions instead of resolving the issue. This defensiveness can stem from feeling threatened in one or more SCARF® domains, such as status or autonomy, leading to a cycle of conflict that is hard to break.  Solution 1: Encourage team members to practice self-awareness and identify their own threat levels when conflicts arise. Teach them to use the SCARF® model to understand the underlying triggers of the conflict, both in themselves and others. By addressing these triggers directly and offering positive signals (e.g., acknowledging others' viewpoints to address status threats), team members can de-escalate tensions and open pathways to constructive dialogue.  Challenge 2: Remote work environments can exacerbate conflicts due to miscommunications and a lack of non-verbal cues, making it harder to interpret others' states of mind and intentions.  Solution 2: Leverage digital communication tools effectively by encouraging the use of video calls to better convey non-verbal cues and foster a sense of connection. Train team members in effective online communication techniques, such as explicitly stating their emotions and intentions to avoid misunderstandings. Encourage regular check-ins and provide forums for open discussion about any misunderstandings or tensions that may arise, applying the CALM model to guide these conversations constructively. FAQS  * How can I identify which SCARF® domain is triggering conflict in a team member during a disagreement? * What are effective strategies for de-escalating a conflict when both parties are highly agitated? * How can I apply the CALM model in a virtual team setting where non-verbal cues are limited? * What steps can I take to prevent groupthink and ensure diverse perspectives are considered during team discussions? * In what ways can I practice and improve my de-escalation skills to be better prepared for future conflicts? | |
| Habit 3: Stay agileSkill 3: Thrive through change (scarf, insight, accountability, CYF, influence) All Characters  Congrats, you’ve made it to the final part of LEAD. Remember, it’s not easy shifting from being an individual contributor to a manager. You have many hard-earned habits that took time to build that helped you succeed individually. These might include things like self-discipline and grit or being incredibly resourceful at getting tasks completed. Many of these habits now need to be let go of and new ones built on top of them. Instead of doing things yourself, you’ll need to know how to motivate others, delegate, and let go. Instead of finding creative solutions to problems, you need to know how to bring others to their own insights.  As you learned at the start of this program, you can’t get rid of habits you don’t like. You can only overwrite them with new habits and give those lots of attention. During this experience you have been slowly building that set of new habits. Now, as this journey wraps up, it’s time to think about making sure these habits stick with you.  One of the ways of doing this is to think about developing systems that activate and support these new management habits. For example, if you want to build the habit of drinking two liters of water a day, you might have a system of not leaving the house without one liter of water and trying to drink it all by lunch, and then refilling it and finishing it before you go to bed each night. This makes it easy to do the right thing. You can think about systems in a number of ways: in terms of physical things around you, like the water bottle, or as a digital tool, like an alarm to remind you to check in on your hydration levels for the day.  Bringing this back to the work environment, there are HR systems for hiring, promoting, doing performance management, and more that can help support some of the habits you’ve built through LEAD. While some of these may not be in your control, let’s focus on what’s within your control that you can do something about. For example, let’s say you want to work on Skill 24, Own the Outcomes. You could tell your boss you’ll produce a quarterly report to update them on the progress of the team to create positive social pressure. Or you could ask the team for monthly data on a metric that can offer insights into how business is going.  Another way of organizing your system is how you pay attention to the world around you. Given that it is attention that changes the brain, this is obviously a pretty important type of system. It’s also another way of thinking about how you organize your schedule, routines, and calendar. Think of this as planning for success around the habits you want to build. Here are some tips to consider putting in place going forward, though many of you may have applied some of these already during this journey too.  **NILES content:** High-level overview For Skill 3: Thrive Through Change, participants will explore managing the impacts of change on their team's dynamics and individual well-being. Understanding the SCARF® model's relevance during change, this module equips leaders to identify and mitigate the threats in the domains of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness that arise with change. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining a growth mindset, this skill development focuses on strategies to transition teams through change effectively, fostering resilience and adaptability.  Participants will explore how to send positive SCARF signals to reduce perceived threats and maintain a 'toward state,' encouraging open communication, collaboration, and shared problem-solving. They will learn to apply the Choose Your Focus model to direct the team's attention towards outcomes, solutions, and future possibilities rather than dwelling on problems or the discomfort of change. Practical exercises will include creating if-then plans to promote a growth mindset, encouraging the team to see challenges as opportunities for learning and development.  By the end of this module, participants will be equipped with tools to help their teams navigate change more smoothly, ensuring they feel valued, secure, and empowered. Leaders will be prepared to foster an environment where change is seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for growth, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Theory SCARF threats during change:  Change and disruption frequently trigger threats in multiple SCARF domains. For example:  Status   * People may feel their skills are no longer valued or they may be expected to reskill.   Certainty   * The impact of change is often unpredictable. People may wonder what their role will look like in the future, or if their position is secure.   Autonomy   * Change that is caused by external factors can cause people to feel they have little or no control.   Relatedness   * Change can lead to teams being restructured, breaking up familiar in-groups.   Fairness   * Change can create higher workloads, and the need to work harder or longer can create a sense of unfairness. Decisions that leaders make about how to respond to change can be perceived as unfair.  Application How can I send positive SCARF signals to reduce threat during change?  Status   * Collaborate for alternative solutions * Help people see and celebrate their wins * Show that you believe people are competent and capable * Be forgiving when people are experiencing change and accelerated growth * Give people your full attention and show you are listening * Share positive feedback and appreciation * Seek input and ideas from others * Schedule follow up conversations. * Make time for urgent requests to meet. * Focus the conversation on the other person and give them space to talk. * Invite people to challenge your opinion. * Explicitly discuss why speaking up is valued. * Treat mistakes as learning tools. * Role model being a learner and not having all the answers. * Ask for feedback.   Certainty   * Clarify expectations often * Communicate frequently and openly * Stick to agreements * Make the implicit more explicit than usual * Provide clarity via regular updates, even if details are uncertain * Keep people in-the-loop * Check everyone is aligned on next steps * Express confidence in people’s ability to handle challenging situations.   Autonomy   * Provide choice and options where possible * Provide employees choices within clear guidelines * Be open to the ideas of others * Help others identify what they can control   Relatedness   * Encourage and focus on shared goals to create a sense of team * Foster shared experiences * Promote positive social interactions * Build opportunities to connect * Show deep empathy for each other's experience * Validate people’s experiences and feelings. * Give people space to talk about what’s on their mind and ask questions to uncover their experience. * Help others label their emotions. * Acknowledge discomfort and engage in difficult conversations.   Fairness   * Recognize people’s contributions * Be transparent * Name the “elephant in the room”. * Accept and acknowledge individual variation in capacity * Communicate the reasons behind decisions. * Address issues without assigning blame.   How can I apply the Choose Your Focus model to help my team thrive through change?   * If your team is overly focused on detail or problems, instead, direct their focus to the desired outcome, team objectives and plan * If your team are preoccupied with the causal factors of issues, instead focus on how to resolve issues * If your team are overly focused on the past and backstory, instead focus on the future and how to move forward.   How can I use if-then plans to help my team embrace a growth mindset during change?   * If we test a process improvement and it doesn’t work the first time, then we will look for what we’ve learned from our ‘mistakes’. * If we’re experimenting with a new idea, then I’ll provide guardrails and a safe place to make mistakes, iterate and learn. * If a team member or colleague is exhibiting a fixed mindset, then I’ll use the word "yet" to help them see possibilities.  Challenges and Solutions Challenge 1: Team members might struggle with anxiety and resistance to change, fearing the impact on their roles and the uncertainty of future outcomes.  Solution 1: Leaders can mitigate this by maintaining transparent, frequent communication about the changes, providing as much information as possible to clarify uncertainties. Encouraging team participation in decision-making processes can also help by giving team members a sense of control and inclusion in shaping their future work environment.  Challenge 2: Changes within the organization can trigger a sense of loss among employees, leading to decreased motivation and engagement due to perceived threats to their status and job security.  Solution 2: To address this, focus on recognizing and valuing each team member's contributions, emphasizing the importance of their skills in the new context. Implementing a recognition program that highlights individual and team achievements during the transition phase can bolster morale and reinforce their value to the organization.  Challenge 3: The restructuring of teams and introduction of new processes may disrupt established relationships and dynamics, leading to feelings of isolation and reduced collaboration.  Solution 3: Create opportunities for team bonding and building new relationships through team-building activities and regular check-ins that focus on personal experiences and emotions related to the change. This can enhance a sense of belonging and support among team members, facilitating smoother transitions and adaptation to new ways of working. FAQS  * How can we identify which SCARF domains are most affected by a specific change in our organization? * What strategies can be implemented to provide clarity and reduce uncertainty during periods of significant change? * In what ways can leaders offer autonomy to team members when organizational changes seem to limit their control over work processes? * How can we foster a sense of relatedness and team cohesion when team structures or roles are being redefined? * What are effective methods to ensure fairness and transparency when changes lead to varied workloads or responsibilities among team members? | |

## APPENDICE

### (MODULE 1- Manage Myself)

### Habit 1: Optimize my brain

### Skill 1: Sharpen focus (Cognitive capacity)

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###### Glossary of terms:

**Cognitive Capacity:** The availability of cognitive and attentional resources at any given moment, important for understanding limitations in processing information and maintaining focus.

**Executive Functions:** Brain functions including planning, attention, memory, self-control, and focus, central to managing cognitive and attentional capacities.

**Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** A critical brain region responsible for controlling executive functions, including task switching, working memory updating, and response inhibition.

**Working Memory:** The cognitive system allows temporary holding of multiple pieces of information for immediate use and manipulation.

**Conscious Processing:** Deliberate and slow cognitive processing that involves executive functions and is facilitated by the prefrontal cortex.

**Nonconscious Processing:** Fast, instinctual processing that handles hardwired information and habits, requiring minimal cognitive effort.

**Multitasking**: The attempt to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, which is actually rapid task switching that can impair performance.

**Attention Management**: The practice of managing where one's focus is directed, essential for navigating work environments marked by stress and digital overload.

**Cognitive Effort:** The mental effort required to process information, solve problems, or perform tasks, which affects the amount of information one can effectively work with.

**Task Difficulty Levels:** The classification of tasks based on their cognitive demand, from Level 1 (minimal thinking required) to Level 3 (high cognitive effort and creativity needed).

**Distractions:** Internal or external factors that divert attention away from tasks, impacting focus and cognitive performance.

### Skill 2: Get unstuck (Insight)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Quiet Reflection Time:** Designated periods of tranquility, free from external distractions, allowing the brain to explore subtler signals and thoughts.

**Internal Focus:** Shifting attention inward, away from external stimuli, towards the process and content of one's thoughts, enhancing problem-solving capabilities.

**Positive Emotion:** States of mind that are uplifting or cheerful, facilitating easier access to insights by reducing cognitive strain and promoting a relaxed yet attentive mindset.

**Conscious Problem Solving:** The deliberate attempt to find solutions using logical and analytical thinking, in contrast to allowing the subconscious to process information freely.

**Buffer Time:** Short intervals scheduled between tasks or meetings, enabling mental rest and the possibility for spontaneous insight.

**Mapping/Drawing Thoughts:** Visual or graphic representation of ideas or thought processes, aiding in internal reflection and clarification of complex concepts.

**Subconscious Processing:** Allowing the brain to work on problems or concepts at a level below conscious awareness, often leading to sudden insights or solutions.

**Insight Conditions:** The optimal environmental and cognitive conditions that foster the emergence of insights, including quiet, positive emotion, reduced external focus, and minimal direct problem-solving effort.

### Skill 3: Challenge Assumptions (Bias)

###### Reference or sources:

Citation: Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow. Macmillan.

Lieberman, M. D., Rock, D., Halvorson, H. G., & Cox, C. L. (2015). Breaking bias updated: The SEEDS Model®. NeuroLeadership Journal, Volume 6. Banaji, M. R., Greenwald, A. G., & Martin, E. (2016). Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people. New York: Bantam.

###### Glossary of terms:

**Cognitive Biases:** Mental shortcuts or automatic, subconscious processes that help streamline decision-making but can also lead to errors in thinking, rushed decisions, and suboptimal outcomes.

SEEDS® Model**:** A framework categorizing five main types of biases that influence everyday thinking: Similarity, Expedience, Experience, Distance, and Safety biases.

**Similarity Bias:** The tendency to favor individuals or ideas that resemble ourselves or our in-group, leading to preferential treatment based on perceived likeness.

**Expedience Bias:** A bias that leads to quick judgments based on readily available or easily recalled information, often resulting in evaluating options based on incomplete or flawed data.

**Experience Bias:** The belief that our perceptions are accurate and reflect objective reality, failing to recognize our subjective and limited viewpoint.

**Distance Bias:** The unconscious devaluation of people, events, or ideas that are psychologically distant from us, overvaluing what is nearby in time and space.

**Safety Bias:** The predisposition to prioritize avoidance of loss and threat over potential gains, based on the brain’s threat-detection system.

**Cognitive Elaboration:** A process in which diverse teams engage in deeper, broader thinking by making more effort to explain their ideas, supported by the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

**Cognitive Overwhelm:** A state in which an individual faces excessive mental demand, leading to quick, potentially biased decision-making due to limited cognitive resources.

**Decision-Making Process:** A structured approach to making choices, which can be enhanced by mitigating biases through strategies like seeking diverse opinions, breaking decisions into steps, and engaging in perspective-taking exercises.

**Mitigation Strategies:** Practical actions taken to counteract cognitive biases, ensuring more objective, equitable, and informed decision-making, such as creating shared goals, increasing visibility of diversity, and slowing down the process to consider a wider range of information.

### Habit 2: Regulate Emotions

### Skill 1: Understand emotions (Toward and away, 3 levels)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Limbic System**: A complex system of nerves and networks in the brain, involving several areas near the edge of the cortex concerned with instinct and mood. It controls basic emotions (fear, pleasure, anger) and drives (hunger, sex, dominance, care of offspring).

**Threat Response:** The brain’s reaction to perceived danger, activating the fight-or-flight response through various brain structures within the limbic system.

**Reward Response:** The brain’s reaction to positive stimuli that are perceived as beneficial or pleasurable, leading towards actions that are likely to repeat such rewarding experiences.

**Fight-or-Flight Response:** A physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival, preparing the body to fight or flee.

**Executive Functions:** Higher-level cognitive skills used to control and coordinate other cognitive abilities and behaviors, including attention, working memory, problem-solving, and planning.

**Emotional Intelligence:** The capability to recognize your own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goals.

**Prefrontal Cortex:** The part of the brain located at the front of the frontal lobe, associated with high-level cognitive functions such as decision-making, problem-solving, impulse control, and social interaction.

**Level 1 Threat:** A state of alertness without alarm, where there is an awareness of potential danger but without significant emotional disturbance.

**Level 2 Threat:** A state of somewhat alarm, where the brain registers more imminent danger, leading to heightened physiological and psychological responses.

**Level 3 Threat:** A state of high alarm or survival mode, characterized by intense physiological and psychological reactions where complex thinking is impaired.

**Emotional Cue:** A physical or emotional signal that indicates the emotional state of an individual, often leading to an empathetic response by others.

**Vulnerability:** The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally, and its recognition as a strength in the context of emotional expression and connection.

### Skill 2: Manage distractions

###### Glossary of terms:

**Emotional Regulation:** The process of recognizing, understanding, and managing one's emotional responses.

**Suppression:** An attempt to conceal or hold down emotional responses, which paradoxically increases limbic system arousal and can negatively impact interpersonal dynamics.

**Labeling:** The practice of using specific "feeling words" or metaphors to succinctly name emotional states, which helps engage the brain's braking system and reduce emotional arousal.

**Limbic System:** A complex system within the brain involved in emotion, behavior, and long-term memory, particularly associated with the brain's response to perceived threats and rewards.

**Amygdala:** A component of the limbic system responsible for detecting emotional stimuli and making rapid judgments about potential threats, triggering the fight-or-flight response.

**Right Ventrolateral Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** A region of the brain implicated in inhibiting emotional responses and engaging cognitive control over emotions, acting as the brain’s braking system.

**Fight-or-Flight Response:** An automatic physiological reaction to an event perceived as threatening or dangerous, preparing the body to fight or flee from the threat.

**Cognitive Effort:** The mental energy required to process information, solve problems, and manage emotional responses.

**Emotional Arousal:** The physiological and psychological state of being awoken or activated to an emotional experience, often involving heightened alertness or excitement.

**Brain’s Braking System:** Refers to neural mechanisms, particularly within the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, that help regulate emotional responses and facilitate cognitive control.

**Feeling Words:** Specific words used to accurately describe emotional states, such as "angry", "overwhelmed", or "anxious", which are crucial in the practice of labeling.

**Limbic Arousal:** The activation of the limbic system in response to emotional stimuli, which can impact focus, decision-making, and interpersonal relations.

### Skill 3: Shift perspective (reappraisal)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Cognitive Reappraisal:** A strategy of emotional regulation where the emotional response to a situation is changed by altering one's interpretation of that situation.

**Detached Reappraisal:** A form of cognitive reappraisal where one decreases emotional impact by distancing themselves emotionally from the situation, similar to reducing the volume on a television.

**Positive Reappraisal: A** form of cognitive reappraisal that involves changing the channel on a television; looking for positive aspects or growth opportunities in challenging situations.

**Emotional Valence:** The intrinsic attractiveness (positive valence) or averseness (negative valence) of an event, object, or situation.

**Cognitive Control:** The ability to regulate one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in pursuit of long-term goals.

**Executive Functioning:** A set of cognitive processes that are necessary for the cognitive control of behavior: selecting and successfully monitoring behaviors that facilitate the attainment of chosen goals.

**Limbic System:** A complex system within the brain involved in emotion, behavior, and memory. It plays a key role in the body's response to emotional stimuli.

**Amygdala:** Part of the limbic system, the amygdala plays a crucial role in emotion processing and is particularly known for its involvement in the fear response.

**Right Ventrolateral Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** Part of the prefrontal cortex involved in inhibiting emotions and emotional responses, assisting with emotional regulation by dampening amygdala activity.

**Acceptance:** An emotional regulation strategy where one acknowledges and accepts their emotional experience as a valid and fleeting aspect of their existence, without attempting to change it.

### Habit 3: Sustain Good Thinking

### Skill 1: Know my drivers (light SCARF, SCARF assessment)

###### Glossary of terms:

**SCARF® Model:** A framework developed by Dr. David Rock that outlines five social domains that drive human behavior in social settings: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

**Status:** Refers to one’s perceived relative importance or ranking within a social or professional context.

**Certainty:** The need for predictability, understanding, and clarity about the future.

**Autonomy:** The sense of control over one’s life and the perception of having choices.

**Relatedness:** The feeling of safety and trust in relationships, or a sense of belonging within a group.

**Fairness:** The perception of being treated justly and equitably in comparison to others.

**Toward Response:** A positive emotional and physiological reaction to an event that is perceived as rewarding or fulfilling a social need, leading to engagement and approach behavior.

**Away Response:** A negative emotional and physiological reaction to a perceived threat or unmet social need, leading to disengagement and avoidance behavior.

**SCARF Buffers:** Strategies to amplify social rewards and mitigate social threats within each of the SCARF domains, enhancing overall well-being and performance.

**Cognitive Reappraisal:** A process of reinterpreting a situation to change its emotional impact, often used in managing emotional responses.

**Social Triggers:** Specific events or interactions that activate a reward or threat response within the context of the SCARF model.

**Emotional Regulation:** The ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in a mindful and effective way.

**Social Rewards/Threats:** Perceptions or experiences in social environments that can trigger positive (reward) or negative (threat) emotional responses based on the SCARF model.

**Procedural Fairness:** The perception that the processes leading to outcomes or decisions are conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

### Skill 2: Get more resilient (Healthy Mind Platter)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Healthy Mind Platter:** A concept devised by Dr. David Rock and Dr. Dan Siegel that outlines seven daily essential activities for optimal brain health: Focus Time, Sleep Time, Connecting Time, Time In, Down Time, Physical Time, and Play Time.

**Focus Time:** Engaging in tasks that require concentrated effort, using executive functions, which can lead to a state of flow.

**Sleep Time:** Restorative period crucial for learning, memory consolidation, and emotional processing.

**Connecting Time:** Building and nurturing social connections to enhance a sense of belonging and relatedness.

**Time In:** Reflective practices such as meditation or mindfulness, fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation.

**Down Time:** Unstructured, unplanned periods where the mind can wander, facilitating creativity and problem-solving.

**Physical Time:** Activities that involve physical movement, contributing to physical and cognitive health.

**Play Time:** Engaging in fun, enjoyable activities that stimulate creativity and learning.

**Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** The region of the brain associated with planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making, and moderating social behaviour.

**Flow:** A mental state of operation in which a person is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity.

**Mind-Wandering:** A cognitive state in which one's attention drifts away from a primary task towards unrelated thoughts or fantasies.

**Executive Function:** A set of cognitive processes including attentional control, inhibitory control, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, as well as reasoning, problem-solving, and planning.

**SCARF Buffers:** Strategies designed to amplify social rewards and mitigate threats within the domains of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

**Resilience:** The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; emotional strength.

**Meditation:** A practice of concentrated focus upon a sound, object, visualization, the breath, movement, or attention itself in order to increase awareness of the present moment, reduce stress, promote relaxation, and enhance personal and spiritual growth.

**Cognitive Reappraisal:** A form of emotional regulation strategy that involves changing the trajectory of an emotional response by reinterpreting the meaning of the emotional stimulus.

### Skill 3: Deepen my growth mindset

###### Glossary of terms:

**Growth Mindset:** The belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, effort, and hard work. This perspective values learning and sees challenges, effort, and mistakes as opportunities for growth.

**Fixed Mindset:** The belief that intelligence and talents are innate traits that cannot be significantly developed. People with a fixed mindset may avoid challenges, give up easily, and see effort as fruitless when it comes to improving abilities.

**Metacognition:** The process of thinking about one's own thinking. It involves self-awareness about cognitive processes and the ability to self-regulate those processes in response to specific situations or challenges.

**If-Then Plans:** A strategy for behavior change that involves formulating specific actions (then) in response to certain situations (if), aimed at promoting a growth mindset and proactive problem-solving.

**Mindset Mantras:** Positive affirmations or statements that reinforce a growth mindset philosophy, such as “progress, not perfection” or “challenges are opportunities.”

**Feedback:** Constructive information regarding one's performance or behavior, intended to foster learning and development. In a growth mindset, feedback is valued as a resource for improvement and progress.

**Flow:** A state of complete immersion and engagement in an activity, where people often experience both peak performance and enjoyment. Flow occurs when challenges are balanced with the individual's level of skill.

**Learning Process:** The process through which acquiring new, or modifying existing, knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences can happen. A growth mindset views the learning process as ongoing and essential for personal development.

**Challenge:** A task or situation that requires one to use some effort and skill to overcome. Those with a growth mindset view challenges as opportunities to grow and learn rather than threats to their intelligence or abilities.

**Resilience**: The capability to recover quickly from difficulties and adapt in the face of adversity, conflict, and challenging or changing circumstances. It's closely associated with having a growth mindset.

**Experimentation**: The act of trying new methods, ideas, or activities to learn and grow. Experimentation is encouraged in a growth mindset as a way to discover and develop new skills and strategies.

**Skill Development:** The process of learning and developing abilities or competencies in a specific area. A growth mindset promotes continuous skill development through effort, practice, and learning from failure.

### (MODULE 2 - Mobilize Others)

### Habit 1: Connect efficiently

### Skill 1: Tune in (empathy & influence) / Build strong connections

###### Glossary of terms:

**Mindfulness**: The practice of being fully present and engaged in the moment, aware of one's thoughts and feelings without distraction or judgment.

**Neural Synchronization:** The process where the neural activities of two or more individuals become aligned or synchronized during effective communication, enhancing understanding and connection.

**Narrative Experience:** A mode of processing reality focused on the self, others, past, and future, often involving planning, daydreaming, and ruminating.

**Direct Experience:** The state of mind where attention is focused on real-time sensory information rather than on thoughts about the past, future, or oneself.

**Neural Activity:** The electrical and chemical processes in the brain that allow for thought, emotion, and sensorimotor function.

**Motor Cortex:** A region of the cerebral cortex involved in the planning, control, and execution of voluntary movements.

**Sensory System:** The part of the nervous system responsible for processing sensory information, including sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

**Emotional Regulation:** The ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences effectively, balancing one's emotional state.

**Connection:** The state of being related, associated, or linked with others, characterized by feelings of empathy, understanding, and shared experience.

**Meditation:** A practice of focused attention and mindfulness, often used to cultivate a state of calm and enhance self-awareness.

**Flow of Conversation:** The smooth, continuous exchange of information and emotions between individuals during an interaction.

**Listening to Learn:** An approach to listening where the goal is to truly understand the speaker's perspectives and emotions, beyond just hearing the words spoken.

**Neural Activity Synchronization:** The phenomenon where the brain activity of two individuals becomes aligned, facilitating communication and empathy.

**Metacognition:** The awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes, allowing individuals to observe and adjust their mindset and reactions.

**Engagement:** The state or condition of being involved, interested, or absorbed in something, often leading to improved relationships and outcomes.

### Skill 2: Ensure shared understanding

###### Glossary of terms:

**SSG (Succinct, Specific, and Generous):** A communication technique that emphasizes being clear, concise, and empathetically tailored to the listener's perspective to foster mutual understanding and enhance collaborative efforts.

**Succinct:** Communicating in a manner that is brief and to the point, minimizing cognitive load on the listener's prefrontal cortex (PFC) by focusing on the essence of the message with as few words as necessary.

**Specific:** Providing clear, detailed information without being vague or overly broad, creating a vivid mental map for the listener. This involves including all relevant details while excluding irrelevant data to increase certainty and clarity.

**Generous:** Tailoring communication to have a positive impact on the listener by using empathy, adapting to their terminology and communication style, and sharing personal insights to increase relatedness and psychological safety.

**Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** The part of the brain involved in complex behaviors, including planning, decision-making, and moderating social behavior. It has a limited capacity and is easily overwhelmed by too much information or complexity.

**Towards State:** A mental state that occurs when an individual feels rewarded, leading to engagement, openness, and cooperation. It is fostered by clarity, certainty, and positive social connections.

**Mental Map:** An internal representation of information, which helps the listener organize and understand messages more effectively.

**Cognitive Load:** The total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory, with higher loads potentially leading to processing difficulties or overwhelmed mental states.

**Psychological Safety:** A shared belief held by team members that the team is a safe place for interpersonal risk-taking, where making mistakes without fear of judgment or negative consequences is accepted.

**Brain-Friendly Communication:** Strategies and techniques that align with how the brain naturally processes information, facilitating easier understanding, greater recall, and more meaningful engagement.

**Positive Impact:** The effect of communication that enhances understanding, relationships, and outcomes by fostering positive emotions, clarity, and mutual respect.

**Shared Understanding:** A mutual agreement and comprehension of information, goals, and expectations among all parties involved, contributing to effective collaboration and coordination.

**Concrete Examples:** Specific instances or illustrations provided to clarify a concept or help solidify understanding by relating abstract ideas to tangible scenarios.

### Skill 3: Accelerate Insights (TAPS)

###### Glossary of terms:

**TAPS Model®:** A conversational framework designed to shift focus towards eliciting solutions rather than dwelling on problems, consisting of four approaches: Tell, Ask, Problem, Solution.

**Insight:** A sudden and often novel realization of the solution to a problem; it reorganizes one’s thoughts or understanding about a situation, often leading to a new perspective.

**Ask about the Solution:** Engaging in a future-focused dialogue that encourages the other person to explore and develop their thinking about how to resolve a challenge, representing a coaching approach.

**Tell about the Solution:** Providing an answer or solution based on one's own expertise, acting in the role of a mentor or trainer.

**Ask about the Problem:** A retrospective conversation focusing on the causes and roots of an issue.

**Tell about the Problem:** Acting as a critic by analyzing and informing what is not working.

**Coaching Approach:** A method of guiding others to discover solutions and insights independently rather than providing direct answers, facilitating personal and professional growth.

**Nonlinear Problem-Solving:** Solving an issue in a holistic, flexible manner that may not follow a structured or sequential process, often conducive to generating insights.

**Linear Problem-Solving:** Utilizing a structured, step-by-step approach to address issues, relying on known facts and logical progression.

**Threat State:** A mental condition induced by perceived threats, which can inhibit openness to new ideas and reduce the likelihood of insight.

**Towards State:** A mental condition characterized by feelings of safety and openness, which promotes engagement and the generation of insights.

**Quiet Brain:** A state of minimal mental noise that enables the weak signals of an emerging insight to be noticed, akin to hearing a phone ring at a quiet party.

**Internally Focused:** A state of reflection and inward focus that facilitates the non-conscious processing required for insight generation.

**Positive Emotion:** A slight positive mindset that helps minimize threat and opens the mind to new ideas, enhancing the conditions for insight.

**Cognitive Load:** The total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory, affecting one’s ability to process new information and generate insights.

**Autonomy:** The capacity to make decisions independently, contributing to personal satisfaction and innovation; highly related to the generation of insights.

**Cognitive Diversity:** The inclusion of individuals with different modes of problem-solving and thinking, which enriches team discussions and fosters innovative solutions.

**Que-ggestion:** A question that is actually a suggestion in disguise, potentially creating a threat to the receiver's status and autonomy.

**Insight Generation Conditions:** The set of environmental and mental conditions conducive to generating insights, including quiet, internal focus, positive emotion, and distance from the problem.

**Storytelling:** A method to facilitate connections and insights, providing new and memorable ways for information to be consolidated.

### Habit 2: Set the right course

### Skill 1: Personalize interactions (Threat within a 1:1: overwhelming, mild, manageable threat-scarf S and R)

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###### Glossary of terms:

**SCARF® Model:** A framework developed by the NeuroLeadership Institute that identifies five domains of human social experience: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness. It is used to understand and influence human behavior in social contexts.

**Status:** Perceived relative importance to others. Positive signals include praising growth and showing belief in competence.

**Certainty:** The need for clarity and predictability. Positive signals involve clarifying expectations and providing regular updates.

**Autonomy:** The sense of control over events. Positive signals include providing choice and making decisions as a team.

**Relatedness:** The sense of safety and belonging with others. Positive signals focus on fostering shared goals and promoting positive social interactions.

**Fairness:** The perception of fair exchanges between people. Positive signals include respecting expertise and being transparent in decision-making processes.

**Positive SCARF Signals:** Actions or communications that enhance one's positive perceptions in the areas of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, thereby reducing threat responses and fostering a positive social environment.

**Threat Signals:** Communications or actions that negatively impact one's perceptions in the SCARF® domains, potentially triggering defensive behaviors or disengagement.

**Personalize Interactions:** Tailoring communication and actions based on an individual's specific SCARF® profile to enhance engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.

**Feedback:** Information shared about actions or behavior, intended to modify or reinforce behavior. Positive SCARF signals involve balancing positives and improvements, and providing feedback preferably only when asked.

**Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of another. In SCARF® context, it contributes significantly to sending positive signals for Relatedness by validating experiences and acknowledging emotions.

**Autonomy in Decision-Making:** Involving individuals in decision-making processes to validate their importance and control, enhancing their Autonomy and Status within the SCARF® framework.

**SCARF® Drivers:** Underlying psychological factors within the SCARF® model that motivate individual behavior in social contexts.

**Agenda Customization:** The practice of tailoring meeting agendas to address the specific priorities, concerns, and SCARF® needs of individuals, enhancing the effectiveness and personal relevance of interactions.

**Praise and Feedback Tailoring:** Adjusting the focus and content of praise and feedback to align with an individual's SCARF® profile, ensuring it is meaningful and fosters growth.

### Skill 2: Set great goals

###### Glossary of terms:

Goal-Setting: The process of identifying something that you want to accomplish and establishing measurable objectives and timeframes to achieve it.

Choose Your Focus™ Model: A framework guiding individuals through different levels of focus necessary for successful goal achievement, including Vision (why), Planning (what), and Detail (how).

Vision: The highest level of focus within the Choose Your Focus™ model, representing the broader purpose or "why" behind a goal, facilitating motivation and engagement.

Planning: The mid-level focus within the Choose Your Focus™ model, outlining the general approach or "what" needs to be done to achieve a goal, without specifying the exact steps.

Detail: The most specific level of focus within the Choose Your Focus™ model, detailing the actionable steps or "how" the goal will be accomplished.

Inspiring Goals: Goals that tap into an individual's emotions and motivation, creating a toward-state and motivating action through personal significance and alignment with values.

Stretch Goals: Ambitious objectives that challenge individuals to extend beyond their current capabilities or comfort zones, promoting growth and learning.

Sticky Goals: Memorable, concise, and impactful goals that are easily recalled and engaged with, aiding in consistent focus and effort towards goal achievement.

Toward-State: A psychological state characterized by engagement, motivation, and openness, often resultant from positive goal orientation and inspiring objectives.

Away-State: A psychological condition marked by avoidance, resistance, or disengagement, typically triggered by negative aspects or perceptions of a goal.

Intrinsic Motivation: The drive to perform an activity for its own sake and the personal rewards it brings, as opposed to external pressures or rewards.

Goal Pursuit: The ongoing process of working towards the achievement of a goal, which may involve planning, executing actions, and overcoming obstacles.

Goal Hierarchy: A structure where smaller, concrete goals are nested within larger, more abstract goals, providing a path from immediate actions to overarching purpose.

Approach-Avoidance Motivation Theory: A theory suggesting there are two motivation systems: one that is sensitive to rewards (approach) and one that is sensitive to punishment (avoidance).

Implementation Intentions: Specific plans formulated as "if-then" statements to help individuals anticipate potential challenges and responses, thereby increasing the likelihood of goal achievement.

Motivation Networks: Neural networks within the brain that are activated during motivated behavior, including the pursuit and achievement of goals.

Goal Representation: The mental conceptualization of a goal, including its importance, required actions, and underlying motivation.

Goal Motivation: The drive or desire to achieve a goal, influenced by how the goal is framed and aligned with individual values and motivations.

Problem Focus: Concentration on issues or obstacles that can shift individuals into an away state, hindering creativity and emotional well-being.

Drama: An emotionally charged state that complicates logical thinking and problem-solving by blending levels of focus with high emotional intensity.

### Skill 3: Delegate and let go (SCARF: status, autonomy, certainty)

###### Glossary of terms:

**TAPS Model®:** A framework designed to guide conversations towards eliciting solutions rather than dwelling on problems, through strategic questioning. The acronym stands for Tell, Ask, Problem, Solution, representing different ways to approach a challenge.

**Engagement:** The process of actively involving participants in a conversation or activity that fosters creativity, innovation, and solution finding.

**Autonomy:** The psychological and operational state of having the freedom to make decisions independently, a key element boosted by focusing on solution-oriented questioning.

**Solution-Oriented Mindset:** A cognitive approach that prioritizes finding solutions and moving forward, rather than fixating on problems or obstacles.

**Insight Generation:** The cognitive process through which new, unexpected solutions to problems suddenly come to mind, often accompanied by a sense of clarity and understanding.

**Threat State:** A mind state induced by conversations or questions that evoke social threats, inhibiting the creative and open thinking necessary for insight generation.

Linear vs. Nonlinear Problem-Solving: Linear problem-solving follows a structured, step-by-step approach, whereas nonlinear problem-solving involves a more holistic, flexible, and often insight-driven approach.

Insights: Sudden, clear understandings or discoveries that connect disparate ideas in novel ways, often leading to innovative solutions.

Cognitive Load: The total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory, with excessive cognitive load inhibiting the generation of insights.

Quiet Brain: A state of reduced mental noise, crucial for the emergence of insights, as it allows for the subtle connections between ideas to be noticed.

11. Internally Focused: A cognitive stance where attention is directed inward, facilitating reflection and the combination of existing knowledge in new ways.

12. Positive Emotion: A slight disposition towards positivity, enhancing open-mindedness and the receptiveness for insight.

13. Dopamine: A neurotransmitter associated with the brain's reward system, thought to play a role in the experience of insight by reinforcing engaging and rewarding experiences.

14. Nonobvious Solution: A solution that is not immediately apparent from the current understanding or approach to a problem, often emerging suddenly into the consciousness during moments of insight.

15. Que-ggestions: Questions that are actually thinly veiled suggestions, which can inadvertently impose one's views on others, potentially stifling their autonomy and insight generation.

### Habit 3: Inspire Great Work

### Skill 1: Make feedback the norm (feedback conversations, SCARF)

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###### Glossary of terms:

**Feedback Culture** - A work environment where feedback is regularly sought, given, and received as an integral part of personal and organizational growth.

**Seeking Feedback** - The act of intentionally asking for insights into one’s performance and behaviors to enhance self-awareness and promote development.

**Growth Mindset** - The belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, which encourages a love for learning and resilience in the face of challenges.

**Cognitive Biases** - Unconscious biases that can distort our perception, including how we perceive our performance and behaviors.

**Status** - In the context of feedback, the sense of importance or esteem we hold or perceive, which can be influenced positively by asking for feedback.

**Certainty** - The sense of clarity and understanding that comes from receiving specific feedback, reducing ambiguity about performance.

**Autonomy** - The control or choice we have over our actions; asking for feedback enhances autonomy by making it a voluntary process.

**Contrast Effect** - The practice of contrasting current behavior with desired behavior to understand the gap between the two, which engages the brain system driving attention and persistence towards goals.

**If-Then Plan (Implementation Intention)** - A planning strategy that links specific situations (if) with desired behaviors (then), increasing the likelihood of achieving goals or changing behaviors.

**Positive Feedback** - Feedback that highlights what is working well, encouraging the repetition or increase of those behaviors.

**Feedback for Improvement** - Also known as constructive feedback; focuses on suggestions for how performance or behaviors can be improved.

**Building on Strengths** - The practice of identifying and reinforcing what individuals are doing well to encourage effective actions and behaviors.

**Refocusing Efforts** - The concept of identifying new behaviors, strategies, or areas where change is needed to enhance performance.

**Blind Spots** - Aspects of our behavior or performance we are unaware of, which can be revealed through feedback from others.

**Frame, Contrast, Commit** - Three critical steps for sharing feedback effectively to create behavior change by setting the right mindset (Frame), highlighting the difference between current and desired behavior (Contrast), and committing to actionable steps (Commit).

**SCARF Model®** - A model that outlines the social domains of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, which influence our reactions to feedback and other social interactions.

**Relatednes**s - A sense of connection and belonging with others; feedback given in a spirit of partnership can enhance relatedness.

**Fairness** - The perception of being treated justly; fair feedback considers the full context and circumstances of performance.

### Skill 2: Maintain momentum

###### Glossary of terms:

**Check-in Conversation** A discussion meant to not just track project progress but also to support personal growth, learning, and well-being, transitioning typical status updates into meaningful interactions.

**SCARF Model** Developed by Dr. David Rock, it outlines five domains of human social experience: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, each playing a key role in shaping human behavior in social contexts.

**Growth Mindset** The belief that one\'s abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work. A concept central to personal and professional development.

**Motivational Drive** The internal motivation that keeps an individual engaged and striving towards their goals, crucial for sustained effort and performance.

**Status** Refers to one\'s relative importance to others, impacting motivation and engagement.

**Certainty** The need for clarity and predictability in one\'s environment, affecting stress levels and satisfaction.

**Autonomy** The sense of having control over one\'s work and decisions, influencing engagement and job satisfaction.

Relatedness How connected individuals feel to each other, which can affect trust and cooperation within teams.

**Fairness** The perception that decisions are made impartially and equitably impacts trust and engagement.

**Onboarding New Hires** The process of integrating new employees into the organization, setting the stage for future success.

**Venting** The act of expressing emotional frustration, which can be a normal part of processing feelings but may need management for productive outcomes.

**Performance Over Time** Evaluating an individual\'s growth, learning, and achievement over a longer period rather than in immediate terms.

**Check-in Strategies** Various approaches used during check-in conversations to foster development, maintain motivation, and support overall well-being.

### Skill 3: Bridge performance gaps

###### Glossary of terms:

**SCARF Model** A framework by Dr. David Rock identifying five domains (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness) that impact humans' social behaviors and reactions to feedback or change.

**Status** Refers to one's perceived importance in relation to others. Feedback can threaten this sense, inducing feelings of being devalued or judged.

**Certainty** The need for clear, predictable information. Ambiguity in feedback creates uncertainty, triggering anxiety and resistance.

**Autonomy** The sense of having control over one’s decisions and actions. Feedback, especially unsolicited, can threaten this sense, leading to pushback.

**Relatedness** The feeling of safety and trust in connections with others. Feedback may threaten this by making one feel isolated or misunderstood.

**Fairness** The perception that decisions and interactions are just and unbiased. Feedback perceived as uninformed or biased challenges this sense.

**Toward State** A neurological state characterized by openness, engagement, and readiness for change, opposed to the defensive 'away state'.

**Fixed Mindset** A belief that abilities are static and cannot be significantly developed, which can hinder receptiveness to constructive feedback.

**Growth Mindset** The understanding that abilities and intelligence can grow with effort and perseverance, essential for personal development.

**Performance Gap** The discrepancy between an individual's current performance and the expected or desired performance level.

**Feedback Resistance** The defensive response to feedback, often stemming from a threat to one or more SCARF elements.

**Self-Reflection** The process of introspecting one’s own behaviors, performances, and areas for improvement.

**If-Then Plans** A planning strategy that links specific scenarios ('if') with pre-planned responses or actions ('then'), which can be particularly effective in reducing threats and improving feedback receptiveness.

**Feedback Sandwich** A widely criticized method of giving feedback, where criticism is buffered with praise before and after. This approach can dilute the impact of the feedback and may be perceived as insincere.

**Mental Contrasting** A cognitive strategy that involves juxtaposing one's current reality with a desired future state, thereby enhancing motivation and clarity for achieving personal or professional goals.

**Co-Creative Conversation** An interaction where both parties contribute ideas and solutions, fostering a sense of collaboration and mutual respect.

### (MODULE 3 - Drive Results)

### Habit 1: Make it Safe

### Skill 1: Foster collaboration (psych safety-related: setting the stage)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Psychological Safety:** A shared belief within a team that one can express ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation.

**SCARF Model:** A framework that outlines five key domains influencing human behavior in social contexts: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

**Status:** The perceived importance or rank of oneself or others within a social context.

**Certainty:** The assurance one has about what the future holds and the clarity of expectations.

**Autonomy:** The sense of having control over one\'s work and decisions.

**Relatedness:** The feeling of connection and belonging within a team or organization.

**Fairness:** The belief that decisions and processes are impartial and just.

**Disagree Productively:** The ability of team members to voice differing opinions in a constructive way that leads to innovation and problem-solving.

**Challenge the Status Quo:** Encouraging behaviors that question existing practices and norms in pursuit of improvement.

**Experiment and Take Appropriate Risks:** The willingness to try new approaches and learn from both successes and failures.

**See Mistakes as Opportunities to Learn:** Adopting a perspective where errors are considered valuable learning moments.

**Hold Each Other Accountable:** The responsibility of team members to ensure everyone meets agreed upon standards and commitments.

**Feedback:** Constructive information regarding someone\'s behavior or work, aimed at improving future performance.

**Empathy**: The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.

**Collaboration**: Working together effectively towards a common goal, leveraging the strengths of each team member.

**Shared Goals:** Objectives that are developed and agreed upon collectively by all team members, promoting a unified direction.

**Team Identity:** The collective sense of who the team is, what they stand for, and what they aim to achieve, enhancing a sense of unity.

**Bias and Preconceptions:** Prejudices or predispositions towards people or ideas, affecting impartiality and fairness.

### Skill 2: Optimally include (inc. parallel processing: active inclusion, make it easy to contribute)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Parallel Processing:** A method that allows all participants in a group to engage and contribute simultaneously, optimizing inclusivity and efficiency in virtual meetings.

**Optimal Inclusion:** The practice of ensuring all team members feel invited to contribute ideas and insights, fostering a culture of active inclusion without overwhelming participation.

**Thoughtful Exclusion:** Mindfully deciding who needs to be present in meetings or communications, balancing inclusion with respect for individuals’ time and focus.

**SCARF Model:** A framework outlining the social domains of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, which influence our behavior in social contexts.

**Bias Mitigation:** Strategies to reduce the impact of unconscious biases, ensuring all voices are heard equally and contributions are evaluated on merit.

**Status Threat:** The feeling of being devalued or not important, which can occur when individuals are excluded from meetings or communications without clear rationale.

**Shared Document:** A digital document that can be edited by multiple people in real-time, facilitating collaborative input and parallel processing.

**Virtual Whiteboard:** An online tool that allows team members to simultaneously contribute ideas, drawings, and notes, enhancing creativity and collaboration.

**Hand Signals:** Gestures used in meetings (in-person or virtual) to silently communicate feedback or votes, supporting parallel processing by allowing nonverbal input.

**Round-Robin:** A meeting technique where each participant is given the opportunity to speak in turn, ensuring equal participation.

**Active Listening:** The practice of fully concentrating on what is being said rather than passively hearing the message, enhancing understanding and empathy.

**RACI Matrix:** A responsibility assignment chart that clarifies the roles of individuals in completing tasks or making decisions, specifying who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed.

**Hybrid Meetings:** Meetings where some participants join in person and others remotely, posing unique challenges for inclusivity and engagement.

**One Virtual, All Virtual Principle:** A strategy for running hybrid meetings by having everyone, including those in the same location, join via separate devices to ensure equal participation.

**Accessibility Needs:** Considerations for making meetings inclusive for participants with disabilities, ensuring everyone can fully engage and contribute.

**Distance Bias:** The unconscious bias that favors people who are physically nearby or similar to us, potentially impacting inclusivity in virtual settings.

### Skill 3: Enable healthy debate (SCARF signals, SEEDS) affirm warmly, challenge kindly)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Constructive Debate:** A discussion aimed at exploring diverse viewpoints and ideas to drive innovation and solutions, prioritizing respect and constructive criticism.

**SCARF Model:** A framework that outlines five social domains (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness) influencing our interactions and reactions in social contexts.

**SEEDS Model:** A model that helps identify and mitigate unconscious biases to support more inclusive and equitable decision-making and interactions.

**Psychological Safety:** The shared belief within a team that one can speak up, share ideas, or offer feedback without fear of punishment or humiliation.

**Shared Purpose:** The collective goals or objectives that unify team members, motivating their contribution towards common outcomes.

**Team Identity:** The collective sense of who the team is, including values, goals, and characteristics that differentiate it from other groups.

**Optimal Distinctiveness:** The balance between belonging to a group and maintaining individual identity, which enhances team cohesion and personal engagement.

**Amygdala:** A region in the brain involved in processing emotions, which can influence focus and decision-making, especially in social contexts.

**Orbitofrontal Cortex:** An area of the brain that plays a role in decision-making and valuation, important for assessing the relevance and importance of goals and feedback.

**Motivational Circuitry:** Neural pathways that drive our engagement and motivation towards activities that align with our values and goals.

**Interpersonal Risks:** The potential negative consequences one might face when expressing ideas, giving feedback, or challenging existing viewpoints in a group setting.

**Active Listening:** The process of fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively hearing, to better understand and engage with the speaker.

**If-Then Plans:** Strategies for effectively navigating future obstacles or challenges by outlining specific actions (then) in response to particular situations or cues (if).

**Cognitive Bias:** Systematic patterns of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment, where individuals create their own "subjective reality" from their perception.

**Curiosity:** A strong desire to know or learn something, propelling individuals towards exploration and discovery.

**Growth Mindset:** The belief that talents and abilities can be developed through dedication, perseverance, and hard work.

**Situational Humility:** Recognizing and acknowledging both one’s strengths and limits, fostering a culture where learning and improvement are valued.

**Neural Synchrony:** The phenomenon where the neural activities of two or more people become synchronized, enhancing mutual understanding and connection.

### Habit 2: Solve problems faster

### Skill 1: Improve team decisions (CREATE)

###### Glossary of terms:

**CREATE Model:** A structured approach for problem-solving and decision-making that stands for Current Reality, Explore Alternatives, and Thoughtfully Evaluate.

**Current Reality:** The phase where teams assess the present situation, including known and unknown variables, objectives, and vision for desired outcomes.

**Explore Alternatives:** The stage dedicated to generating a wide range of potential solutions and strategies through brainstorming and evaluating without bias.

**Thoughtfully Evaluate:** The final phase where each alternative is objectively assessed considering pros, cons, and potential biases to determine the best course of action.

**Brainstorming:** A group creativity technique where efforts are made to find a conclusion for a specific problem by gathering a list of ideas spontaneously contributed by its members.

**Outside-the-Box Thinking:** Creative thinking that challenges the status quo and explores innovative solutions beyond conventional boundaries.

**Bias Mitigation:** Strategies aimed at identifying and reducing the influence of biases in decision-making processes.

**Consensus:** A general agreement among the members of a group or team.

**Majority Vote:** A decision-making process where the option that receives more than half of the votes is chosen.

**Weighted Criteria:** A method of evaluating alternatives by assigning importance to each criterion and scoring each option accordingly to make informed decisions.

**Reappraisal Questions:** Questions designed to look at an issue from different perspectives to aid in evaluating options and strategies.

**Accountability Management:** The practice of ensuring team members take responsibility for their actions and the outcomes of those actions.

**Threat Circuitry Activation:** The neurological response when an individual perceives a potential threat, affecting their focus, decision-making, and willingness to engage in risk-taking.

**Reward Pathways:** Neural pathways in the brain that release dopamine in response to positive stimuli, encouraging repeat behaviors.

**Status Recognition:** Acknowledging the contribution of individuals or ideas, which helps fulfill the need for status and encourages further participation.

**Interpersonal Risks:** The potential negative outcomes associated with taking actions such as challenging others\' ideas or speaking up in a group.

### Skill 2: Check for bias (SEEDS)

###### Glossary of terms:

**SEEDS Model®:** A framework designed to help individuals and teams identify and mitigate unconscious biases, enhancing objectivity in decision-making.

**Bias Mitigation:** The process of recognizing, addressing, and reducing biases to make more inclusive and fair decisions.

**Groupthink:** A phenomenon where the desire for consensus within a group can lead to poor decision-making, as members suppress dissenting viewpoints and alternatives.

**Similarity Bias:** The tendency to favor individuals who are perceived to be similar to ourselves in some way.

**Safety Bias:** A bias that leads to overly cautious decisions or the reluctance to take necessary risks, often influenced by fear of change or negative outcomes.

**Experience Bias:** The influence of past experiences on decision-making, sometimes leading to overconfidence or the dismissal of new information.

**Expedience Bias:** The tendency to make quick decisions without sufficient deliberation, often under time pressure or in the desire to resolve uncertainty.

**Distance Bias:** A preference for what is near in space and time over what is distant, which can affect attention to and evaluation of remote team members or long-term consequences.

**In-group Bias:** The predisposition to favor members of one\'s own group, leading to preferential treatment and exclusion of outsiders.

**Devil’s Advocate:** A role assigned to someone to intentionally argue against the majority opinion or challenge ideas, with the aim of preventing groupthink and stimulating deeper analysis.

**Chief Contrarian:** Similar to a devil's advocate, a role designated to question and challenge the prevailing sentiments or decisions to ensure thorough examination.

**Meeting Observer:** A team member tasked with monitoring the discussion\'s dynamics, ensuring that all voices are heard, and identifying instances of possible bias or groupthink.

**Diversity of Perspectives:** The inclusion and consideration of a wide range of viewpoints and backgrounds, which enriches decision-making processes and mitigates biases.

**Provocateur:** Someone who provokes discussion or challenges conventional thinking to stimulate creativity and prevent consensus based solely on the desire for harmony.

**Bias Awareness:** The acknowledgment and understanding that biases exist, which is the first step towards actively addressing and mitigating them.

**Consensus Building:** The process of creating agreement among group members, which requires careful management to avoid the pitfalls of groupthink and bias.

**Bias Conversation Norms:** Established practices within a team or organization for openly discussing biases in a constructive and non-defensive manner.

### Skill 3: Own the outcomes (NS of accountability)

###### Glossary of terms:

**Accountability:** The responsibility of individuals to own their actions and the outcomes of those actions within their roles.

**Autonomy:** The ability of employees to have control over how they perform their work, which increases job satisfaction and commitment.

**Growth Mindset:** A perspective that views challenges and failures as opportunities for learning and development.

**Mistake of the Month:** A team activity meant to normalize the discussion of mistakes, focusing on what was learned from those mistakes.

**Role-Modeling:** The practice of leaders demonstrating the behaviors they wish to see in their team members, including owning up to mistakes.

**Outcomes Focus:** Shifting attention from monitoring processes to emphasizing the results and contributions toward organizational goals.

**Surveillance Focus:** An approach centered on closely monitoring employees’ actions, which can limit autonomy and hinder trust.

**Debriefing:** A conversation aimed at extracting lessons and insights from experiences, particularly mistakes or failures.

**Constructive Conversations:** Dialogues that aim to address issues or mistakes in a positive manner, focusing on learning and improvement.

**Empowerment:** Enabling employees to have the confidence and resources to take action and make decisions within their roles.

**Celebrate:** Acknowledging and appreciating the effort and courage it takes to share mistakes and the learnings derived from them.

**Collaboration:** Working together to address challenges, find solutions, and achieve common goals.

**Continuous Improvement:** A systematic, ongoing effort to enhance processes, services, or products through incremental or breakthrough improvements.

**Clarity in Job Expectations:** Clearly communicating the roles, responsibilities, and expectations to employees, so they understand what is required for excellent performance.

**Supportive Leadership:** Offering guidance, resources, and encouragement to help team members achieve their goals and overcome obstacles.

**Trust:** The foundation of strong relationships within a team, characterized by confidence in each other\'s intentions and actions.

**Learning from Mistakes:** Viewing errors as learning opportunities rather than failures, which fosters a positive work culture and encourages innovation.

### Habit 3: Stay agile

### Skill 1: Build the right routines

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###### Glossary of terms:

**Cognitive Load Management:** The practice of controlling the amount of mental effort being expended in order to maximize learning and productivity.

**Peak Cognitive Periods:** Times of the day when an individual's cognitive energy and focus are at their highest.

**Cognitive Fatigue:** Mental exhaustion that results from prolonged cognitive activity, leading to decreased performance and productivity.

**Task Allocation:** The distribution of tasks based on their cognitive demand and the individual\'s capacity to handle them effectively.

**Cognitive Demand:** The amount of mental processing power required to perform a task.

**Routine Tasks:** Activities that require minimal cognitive effort, often repetitive and can be performed with little conscious thought.

**Creative Challenges:** Tasks that demand high levels of creativity, abstract thinking, and cognitive effort.

**PFC (Prefrontal Cortex):** The part of the brain involved in complex behaviors, decision making, and moderating social behavior.

**Short-term Memory:** The capacity to hold a small amount of information in an active, readily available state for a short period of time.

**Working Memory:** The process of temporarily storing and manipulating information needed to carry out complex cognitive tasks.

**Cognitive Resources:** The available mental effort and attention an individual can apply to cognitive tasks.

**Instant Gratification:** The desire to experience pleasure or fulfillment without delay or deferment.

**Mapping Peaks and Troughs:** The process of identifying the high and low points of an individual's daily energy levels and cognitive effectiveness.

**Level 1 Tasks:** Activities that require minimal cognitive effort and are often routine or familiar.

**Level 2 Tasks:** Tasks that present a moderate degree of difficulty, involving working memory and some level of ambiguity.

**Level 3 Tasks:** Activities that demand high cognitive resources, involving creativity, abstract thinking, and often starting from a blank page.

### Skill 2: Smooth out conflict (SCARF, CALM)

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Lowering threat response: “The act of moving from a state of high tension to a state of reduced tension”

###### Glossary of terms:

**SCARF® Model:** A framework identifying five domains of human social experience—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—that influence individual\'s behavior in social contexts.

**De-escalation:** The process of reducing the intensity of a conflict or confrontation, converting potentially aggressive or hostile situations into more manageable and productive interactions.

**Threat Response:** The psychological and physiological reaction to perceived danger or threat, often leading to defensive or aggressive behaviors.

**Reward Signals:** Behaviors, verbal cues, or actions that activate positive responses, reducing threat perceptions and fostering collaboration.

**Multiplier Effect:** The phenomenon where sending positive signals in more than one SCARF® domain results in a compounded positive impact on the recipient.

**Status:** Perception of one's importance or rank within a social hierarchy or group structure.

**Certainty:** The assurance or confidence that one has in understanding a situation or predicting its outcome.

**Autonomy:** The sense of having control or choice over one\'s actions or decisions.

**Relatedness:** The feeling of connection or belonging with others, contributing to social bonds and trust.

**Fairness:** The perception that decisions, processes, and treatments are impartial and equitable.

**Conflict Source Identification:** The process of determining the underlying causes or triggers of a conflict, pivotal for effective resolution strategies.

**Emotional Regulation:** Techniques or strategies used to manage and adjust one's emotional state, crucial for maintaining composure and clear thinking during tense situations.

**Bias Recognition:** The awareness of unconscious prejudices or stereotypes that may influence perceptions and behavior, critical for objective conflict resolution.

**Groupthink**: A decision-making flaw where the desire for group consensus overrides individuals\' willingness to present alternatives, critique a position, or express an unpopular opinion.

**Level 1, 2, 3 Threats:** Categorization of threat levels based on intensity and impact on cognitive and emotional processing, used for self-assessment during conflict situations.

**Positive Social Signals:** Actions or communications that aim to reduce social threats and enhance feelings of safety, value, and inclusion within interactions.

**Agitation:** A state of nervous excitement or anxiety, which can escalate tensions and conflicts if not properly managed.

**Role-play:** A simulation-based learning activity that allows individuals to practice behaviors and strategies in a controlled environment, improving skill acquisition through experiential learning.

**Visualization:** A mental imagery technique that involves creating vivid, detailed representations of actions, behaviors, or outcomes in one\'s mind to enhance performance and preparedness.

**Cognitive Load:** The total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory, with implications for how effectively one can process information and make decisions.

**Micro-behaviors:** Subtle, often nonverbal, actions or gestures that communicate attitudes or feelings, playing a significant role in social interactions.

**Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of another, crucial for effective communication and conflict resolution.

### Skill 3: Thrive through change (scarf, insight, accountability, CYF, influence)

###### Glossary of terms:

**SCARF® Model:** A conceptual framework by Dr. David Rock that describes the social experiences affecting the brain in terms of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

**Change Management:** The process of handling changes in a structured manner, focusing on transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state.

**Status:** The relative importance, prestige, or respect accorded to an individual within a group or organization.

**Certainty:** The need for clarity, predictability, and understanding about the future and one\'s role within it.

**Autonomy:** The degree of control or freedom individuals believe they have over their work and decision-making.

**Relatedness:** The sense of belonging and connection with others, and how relationships are maintained and developed.

**Fairness:** The perception of just and equitable treatment within interpersonal and organizational contexts.

**Growth Mindset:** The belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, hard work, and learning from experiences, including mistakes.

**Choose Your Focus Model:** A strategy for directing attention towards productive and solution-oriented thinking, rather than dwelling on problems or limitations.

**If-Then Plans:** Pre-established strategies for responding to specific situations or challenges, promoting proactive behavior and a growth mindset.

**Resilience:** The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; the ability to thrive and grow in the face of challenges and change.

**Adaptability:** The quality of being able to adjust to new conditions and challenges with flexibility and resourcefulness.

**Positive SCARF Signals:** Communication and behaviors designed to minimize the perception of social threats and increase feelings of reward within the contexts of Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

**Collaboration:** Working together effectively towards shared goals, leveraging the strengths and talents of each team member.

**Shared Problem-Solving:** A collective approach to identifying, analyzing, and resolving issues, emphasizing open communication and mutual support.

**Open Communication:** The practice of sharing information freely and transparently, fostering trust and clarity within teams.

**Feedback and Appreciation:** Recognizing and valuing contributions and achievements, critical for motivation and engagement, especially during periods of change.