Liminal Thinking
by Dave Gray, published 2016

Foreward
 Dave's definition of liminal
 " What is liminal thinking? Liminal is a word that means boundary, doorway, portal. Not this or that, not the old way or the new way, but neither & both. A state of ambiguity or disorientation that precedes a breakthrough to a new kind of thinking. The space between. "

 "Liminal thinking is a kind of psychological agility that enables you to successfully navigate these times of transition. It involves the ability to read your own beliefs & needs; the ability to read others' beliefs & needs; and the habit of continually evaluating, validating, and changing beliefs in order to better meet needs. "

Preface, how this book came to be
 "His art is helping people break down, examine, explore, analyze, and reconfigure their beliefs." (talking about Kurt Hanks)
 * beliefs are often the main things in the way of change for indiv., orgs, etc families
 * kurt's fundamental premise:
 "We construct our beliefs, mostly unconsciously, and thereafter they hold us captive. They can help us focus & make us more effective, but sadly, they also can limit us: they blind us to possibility & subject us to fog, fear, and doubt."

Introduction, what is Liminal Thinking?
 * thinking at the threshold, most boundaries are made up.
                              + change happens at boundaries
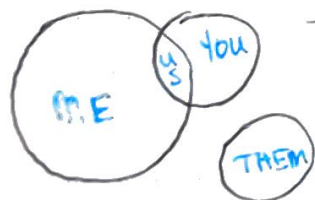
 Convenient fictions "these are liminal roles bc they are associated w/ growth & change, which involve breaking, shifting, or otherwise transcending boundaries."

 * the most important material to understand for liminal thinking is BELIEF
Pt.1 How Beliefs Shape Everything
    * goes through Beliefs about Beliefs ⟶

P.1 Beliefs are Models

"Einstein once said that it was his religion to believe in the existence of a real world, because he could not prove it." So we need to agree that there is a valid, objective reality + we're limited by our POV

Our ideas about reality != reality
↳ our model, our beliefs
↳ everything you know

*cultivate the ability to hear what other people find obvious + be aware that your obvious is not ~~always~~ obvious

P.2 Beliefs are Created

Construct beliefs layer by layer using the pyramid of belief based on the ladder of Inference (Chris Argyris)

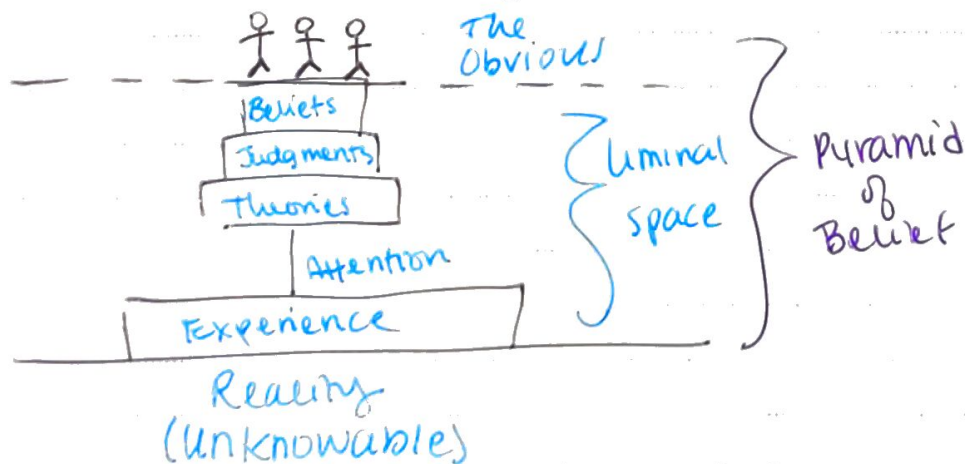* the way + abilities we have for interpreting reality are different from person to person
* You're limited by your experience, what you pay attention to + you can be primed to focus on certain things or needs
  ↳ You can to some degree direct your attention but it's like a needle on a record player
  ↳ generate theories → judgments
* experiences, attention + theories + judgments help transform reality from something unknowable to a mental model that can easily be used (aka your beliefs) + this forms what you find "obvious"
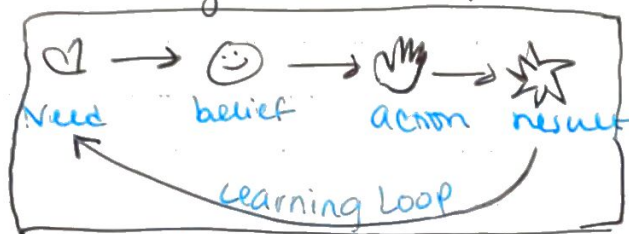* the space b/w reality + the obvious is liminal ~~space~~ space

The
Obvious

Beliefs
Judgments
Theories
Attention
Experience

Liminal
space

Pyramid
of
Belief

Reality
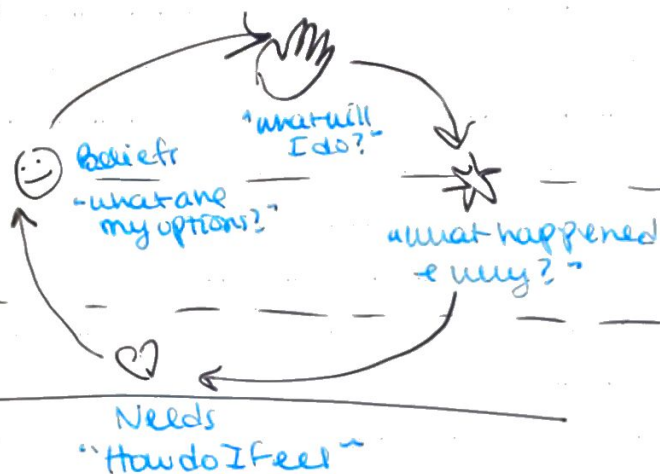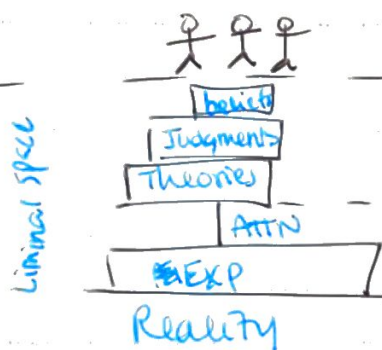(Unknowable)

P. 3 Beliefs Create a Shared World

"A belief is a story in your head", a cause & effect chain
• if you have a need → look for belief that → provides a rule for
action → get result you want & needs come from your
experience of the world or feelings
* an effective belief is one that
works.

The Obvious

Learning Loop
Need   belief   action   result

Liminal space

belief
Judgments
Theories
ATTN
EXP

Reality

Belief
"what are
my options?"

"what will
I do?"

"what happened
& why?"

Needs
"How do I feel"

* You can end up in learning loops w/others that reinforce
negative beliefs, generating a doom loop
* when 2+ learning loops interact like this it can generate
a system of belief & behavior called a story web which is
a shared world co-created by its inhabitants
* a self-reinforcing learning loop of positive behavior is a delight loop
* Story webs create different shared worlds
"But to practice liminal thinking, it's important to remember that "the
way it is" is something we have created together, and if we can
create it, we can change it."

P. 4 Beliefs Create Blind Spots

"Liminal thinking is a way to identify limiting beliefs & open your-
self to hitherto unseen possibilities that can open new doors"
* the people around you + yourself can have limiting beliefs that
create blindspots.

P.5 Beliefs Defend Themselves

* Collectively we can create a bubble of belief that reinforces + protects our existing beliefs by denying that alt. beliefs are possible.

* Argyris called this self-sealing logic + the longer a group of people stick up this self-sealing logic the likely it is that it doesn't match reality

"New information from outside the bubble of belief is discounted, or distorted, because it conflicts with version of reality that exists inside the bubble."

• 2 ways people evaluate new ideas:
  ① is it internally coherent? (make sense in bubble) ← if this fails ppl rarely get to this question
  ② is it externally valid? (Can I test it?)
  "People rarely test ideas for external validity when they don't have internal coherence"

"Liminal thinking requires a willingness to test + validate new ideas, even when they seem absurd, crazy, or wrong."

* Your bubble is _not_ reality itself.

P.6 Beliefs are Tied to Identity

• governing belief: a belief deeply tied to identity + feelings of self-worth
  "When an emotional need is unfulfilled - especially when it remains unfulfilled for some time - the brain seeks to fill that gap up some kind of explanation"

  * To change a governing belief you would need to change how you see yourself, its not easy.
  "The more foundational belief, the more it will be unconsciously defended by self-sealing logic. This can be a scary place to go."
  ↳ Changing this governing belief would shake the stability of your shared webs + consequently all of your personal relationships.

  * Liminal thinking requires courage to explore.

Part 2. What to do about it

P.1 Assume That You Are Not Objective

known to others	**OPEN** known by you + others	**BLIND SPOT** unknown to you known by others
unknown to others	**HIDDEN** known to you but not by others	**UNKOWN** unknown by both you & others
	known by you	unknown by you

THE JOHARI WINDOW

"if you have a persistent problem that keeps popping up & seems intractable, start by assuming that you are not objective."

"In a system problem, if you're part of the system you're part of the problem."

→ printable list of traits for this exercise: http://xplaner.com/johari window

P.2 Empty Your Cup

* Start by listening & losing your assumptions.
* A successful team will continue doing what's successful even if the environment changes, so they don't change & start messing up.
* Don't give clues about what you want to hear when you ask questions
• beginner's mind, emptying your cup of preconceptions, knowledge, theories & assumptions don't get in the way (in zen practice)

P.3 Create Safe Space

"Reason does not get people to act. Emotion is what causes people to act."

Status, feel important, recognized or needed?
Certainty, feel confident in predicting the future w/ reasonable certainty?
Autonomy, feel like control of their life, work, & destiny?
Relatedness, feel like they belong? Trust group to look after them?
Fairness, feel they are being treated fairly? That the "rules" are fair to them?

* create a safe space for people to share their feelings

"The only way that you can really understand what peoples' motivations are is to create a space that is safe enough for them to come out of their self-sealing logic bubble, to cultivate curiosity & openness, and to give them a feeling of safety."

Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping   Liminality & the Modern
by Paco Underhill   Bjorn Thomassen

P.4 Triangulate & Validate
• What makes a good theory is if it can be proven <u>false</u>
  ↳ falsifiability
"The "crazy person" may be acting based on beliefs that are
inconceivable to you because they are outside your bubble."
* searching the internet is a great faketest & can help reinforce the bubble
* But you can triangulate.
                    ↳ develop ∞ viewpoints & theories that you can
                    compare, contrast, combine & validate to better
                    see what's going on.
                    ↳ then hold them loosely
"People act in a way that makes sense to them. If something
doesn't make sense to you, then you're missing something..."
* sometimes (often) you just need to go talk to them.
P.5 Ask Q's, make Connections
  "That is how Mitch works his change magic, by wandering
around, asking q's & connecting the dots"
  ↳ an outside perspective allows him to evaluate their "obvious"
* these opportunities are latent in the system, waiting for discovery
P.6 Disrupt Routines
  * Sometimes if you attack the habitual solution you disrupt the
  routine & end up with a better outcome
  * if you disrupt your routine what happens next can create new
  openings to try something different
P.7 Act As If in the Here & Now
  "They created, in a temporary way, a possible, parallel
  world, a prototype of a potential city, one that was un-
  constrained by the existing rules."
  * act as if a hypothesis is true & give it a shot, act as if you're
  in a parallel world or as if the world you want to create is
  already here.
  * there's a GIANT range of potential beliefs & actions

Gamestorming & The Connected Company
by Dave Gray

P. 8. make sense w/ stories

"When someone tells you a story, they are sharing an experience + expressing their beliefs about the experience at the same time." → pairing brains

* You can give people a story prompt to help actively create a shared world together

* a story translates facts into "rules for action".

P. 9 Evolve Yourself

* change involves risk + you can't change the world w/o changing yourself

* be flexible w/ the outcomes of a change

"Unless some degree of chaos is permitted to enter the system, no further progress can be made."

"The world turns, things change, and beliefs that once served you well will no longer be valid."

"there can be no real "there can be no real creation w/o some destruction"

Now What?

"The leaders in an organization, or a family, or a nation, or any group, are not always the people at the top."

liminalthinking.com

davegra
dave.gray@gmail.com