

Foresight Skills Assessment: Personal and Team (Mini Version)

Instructions: Please read this handout & answer **twelve questions (1A-D, 2A, 3A-B, 4A-B, 5A-C)**. Write down any **questions of your own** about these topics. We can discuss them in class.

1. Sentiment Foresight and GRASP Thinking

We all express **future sentiment** in **two ways**:

- Strategic Optimism** (seeing and exploiting Advantages and Opportunities)
- Defensive Pessimism** (seeing and protecting against Disruptions and Risks)

We also **mix** these sentiments in a third state:

- Realism (actively contrasting both sentiments**, seeing “both halves of the glass”, very close together in time.



Optimists can excel at foreseeing and **exploiting opportunity**.¹ **Pessimists** can excel at foreseeing and **preventing disaster**.² **Realists** can get **more of the right things done**.³ Effective leaders **value** and provide **psychological safety** for all three sentiment states on their teams. They guard against **overoptimism**, with its **delusions** and **groupthink**, which can grow rapidly with **prior success**. They also guard against **overpessimism**, with its **negativity** and **inaction** (learned helplessness).¹ They also avoid **insufficient use** of praise and criticism (**sentiment states**).

Question

1A. Do you think **you personally** are **more often** a **strategic optimist**, a **defensive pessimist**, or a **realist** (actively contrasting both)? How would you rank (1,2,3) the **time you spend** in each of these three mental states during a typical work week?

Advantage Thinking (Strategic Optimism) _____
Defensive Thinking (Defensive Pessimism) _____
Contrast Thinking (Back and Forth/“Realism”) _____

GRASP Thinking

Mental contrasting (“GRASP thinking”) is a type of **realism** where we **first** think **optimistically** about a valuable **Goal**, then **defensively** about current **Reality** (actual distance from the goal) then **optimistically** about the **Advantages** we’ll get when we achieve the goal, then **defensively** about the **Setbacks** (obstacles) we may face, and then make a strategic **Plan**, with two things:

- Key resources** (mental, physical, network) that will help us succeed and
- If-then statements** regarding how to deal with potential obstacles.



We can climb any mountain one GRASP at a time.
Alex Honnold, *Free Solo*, 2018

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We do most of this kind of thinking **on the fly**, in our heads.

Here's how **GRASP Thinking** works:

- G.** Conceive a worthy, tough **Goal** (Today-, short-, med-, long-term). Feel **good**.
- R.** Estimate the **Reality** (how far you, the team, or envir. is from the goal). Feel **bad**.
- A.** List some **Advantages** to having achieved the goal (optimism). Feel **good**.
- S.** Imagine likely **Setbacks** (defensive pessimism, ways you might fail). Feel **bad**.
- P.** Create a simple **Plan** with a few **key resources** and **if-then statements**. Feel **good**.

In extensive real-world studies, versus using no sentiment when making mental plans, or using optimism or pessimism alone, **GRASP thinking** greatly improves three things:³

1. **Foresight accuracy** (50-100% **less error** when predicting what you'll get done),
2. **Productivity** (30-150% **greater productivity** in a variety of timed tasks), and
3. **Motivation to persist** is enhanced, even when faced with difficult obstacles

Mnemonic: How do we **climb a mountain**? “**One GRASP at a time.**”

Question

1B. For 5 mins, try **GRASP thinking** for an upcoming **personal challenge**. Pick any **short-term** (tomorrow to the next three months) **task or goal**. It can be a **tough task** you have **committed to doing next** or one of your **more difficult or ambitious “stretch goals”**.

- a. **Goal** (Pick something Worthy, Difficult, and Short-term): (1 min)

- b. **Reality** (How far are you now from the goal? How do you measure that?): (1 min)

3. **Advantages** (Optimistically, what happens when the goal is achieved?): (1 min)

4. **Setbacks** (Pessimistically and predictably, how might you fail?): (1 min)

- P. **Plan** (Include 1-2 “key resources” and 1-2 “if-then” statements): (1 min)

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Which of the five GRASP steps was **hardest** for you? How did GRASP **differ**, if at all, from what you **presently do in your head** when thinking about **daily and weekly tasks and goals**? How could you **test GRASP vs. non-GRASP effectiveness** with yourself? With your team?

Sentiment Awareness: Managing Your Optimism:Pessimism (O:P) Ratios

Emotional foresight requires being **aware of** and able to **ethically influence** our and others emotions toward more **accurate** and **productive** states of mind.⁴ Our **Optimism:Pessimism thinking ratios** can either **support** or **work against** our **task contexts**. Consider the following **O:P ratios** and some of their proposed **productive** and **counterproductive contexts**.⁷

O:P Ratio Common Contexts

- 1:1 **Mental Contrasting, GRASP Thinking**; “Realism”⁸ Error! Bookmark not defined.
- 2:1 **Advantage and Opportunity Assessment**; Strategic Optimism⁷
- 1:2 **Disruption and Risk Assessment**; Defensive Pessimism²³
- 4:1 **Relationship Management**⁵ and **Novel Environments**⁹ Error! Bookmark not defined.
- 1:4 **Criticism** Production and **Crisis** Environments
- 8:1 **Selling and Visioning** (productive) and **Manias** (counterproductive)
- 1:8 **Conflict States** (productive) and **Panics** (counterproductive)

Question

1C. Do these Optimism:Pessimism thinking ratios seem roughly correct for the contexts above? For example, in **relationship management**, do you think **you personally** should typically strive to have **four optimistic thoughts** for every **pessimistic thought**? Should you try to say **four positive things** for every **critical thing**? Does it matter if it is your **spouse** vs. **employee**?

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Leading Sentiment on Teams

Leaders can greatly influence team sentiment. They can empower their team to be **mindful** of and **verbal** about **Optimism:Pessimism thinking ratios**, and they can use **routines** to **shift their ratio** whenever it seems counterproductive (too optimistic or too pessimistic).

1. To empower your **strategic optimists**, and defeat **inflexibility** and **fear**, leaders can do **Success Visioning (Stretch Goalsetting)**, asking their team: “How can we **achieve** this (desirable future). What **steps** must we take?”
2. To empower your **defensive pessimists**, and defeat **groupthink** and **ego**, leaders can do **Failure Visioning (Premortems)**, asking their team: “Imagine this (high-profile project) has **failed** or **greatly underperformed**. **How** did it happen?”⁶
3. To empower your **realists**, leaders can do **Progress Checks (Status Checks) and GRASP thinking**, asking their team: “What is our **status** on goals? What should we be **optimistic** about? **Pessimistic** about? Do we need to **update** strategy? **Revise** our plan?”⁷

Question

- 1D.** Can you describe a situation where **your team** or **another** got in trouble by **underusing, overusing, or misusing** strategic optimism, defensive pessimism, or realism/contrasting? Does your team need to improve its use of any of these **sentiment states**, in any **context**?

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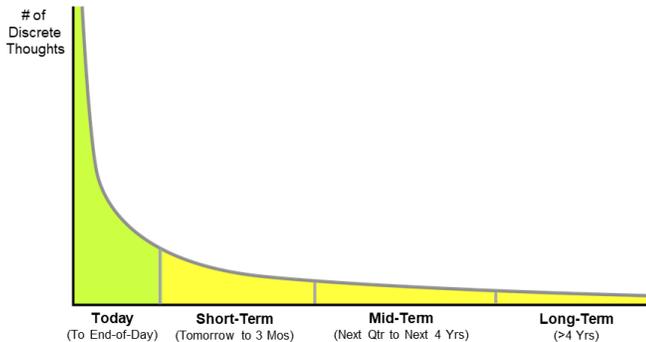
2. The Foresight Horizons (Today's, Short-term, Mid-term, Long-term)

All future thinking occurs in **four foresight horizons**:

1. **Today's Foresight** (Now to End-of-Day)
2. **Short-term Foresight** (the "T's": Tomorrow to Three Mos)
3. **Mid-term Foresight** (the "4's": Next Quarter to 4 years)
4. **Long-term Foresight** (>4 years, your life, future gens)



The Power Law of Future Thinking (55:25:15:5)



Most future thinking is <24 hrs, and unconscious¹

1. Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, 2005.



Most of us think **exponentially less frequently** about events further ahead in time. This is the **Power Law of Future Thinking**. That means getting better at **Today's foresight** is our **greatest** area of potential improvement. Here are a few tips for future thinking about **today**.

Today's Foresight Tips

Today's foresight is the majority of our future thinking. It runs just **seconds, minutes and hours** ahead, and is largely **unconscious**.⁸ Becoming more **deliberate, mindful, and visual** in **today's foresight** (now until end of

day) is the **easiest way** to get better at **Short-term foresight** (tomorrow to next three months). Our **feedback** is **far faster** with today's foresight, and we can **improve** with every **review** of our mistakes. Our **performance here**, especially using the **Eight Skills** (last section), are where our **greatest professional and economic value** lies.⁹

Time and Schedule Awareness

Do you **know what time it is**, all day long? Being **mindful of the time** (guessing it regularly), and of the **time available now until our next event** is one key to today's foresight. We all schedule events with others. **Scheduling our own task-specific time boxes**, and **mentally rehearsing our schedule**, is a level up. We can be **mindful of time before and in each time box**, use **GRASP thinking before each box**, and **be accountable to staying on task in the box**. We can take **brief breaks** within any time box, but our priority is to **get back into the box ASAP**. **Reviewing** how we did after each box ends, vs. our **forecast** (plan) lets us **complete a Do loop** (next section). We can begin **optimistic** at the start of each box (a mini-version of each **new day**) that we can get our **plan** done. Try to schedule at least **four of your own task boxes** a day. Make at least one a **fun or exercise break**.¹⁰ Live your day **schedule-first**, and look only briefly at your **task list**.

Question

2A. How would you grade **yourself** (A-D) on **time and schedule awareness** during the day? Do you schedule time boxes **for your own tasks** every day? Do you **review** how you did? What **routines** have helped you improve these two awarenesses?

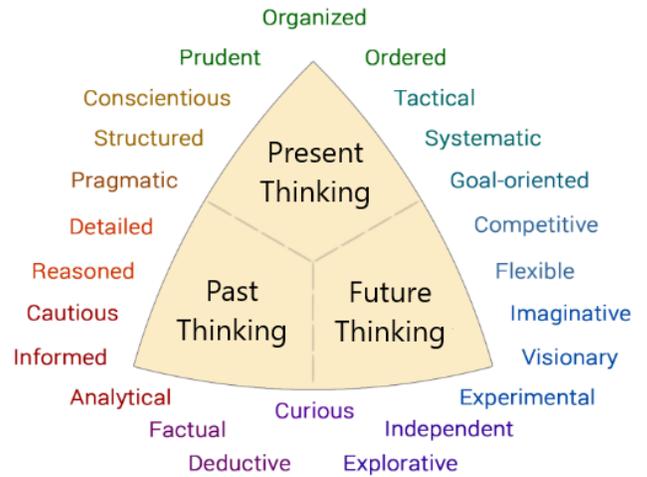
Time and Schedule Awareness (Grade A-D) _____

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3. Time Orientation (Past, Present, Future)

We all think with **three time orientations**:

- a. The Past**, aka *Hindsight* (potentially relevant history, experience, data, practices, and models/hypotheses)
- b. The Present**, aka *Insight* (Self-awareness, social- and situation-awareness, organization, procedures)
- c. The Future**, aka *Foresight* (short- or long-term opportunities, threats, changes, innovations, experiments)



The MindTime graphic at right gives **adjectives** that commonly associate with each of these orientations.

We **bounce rapidly** between all three orientations during the day, yet almost all of us tend to **favor** one or two orientations more. Done right, our **preferred orientations** can give us certain **advantages**:

- **Present thinkers** can excel at **getting things done**.
- **Future thinkers** can excel at seeing what **needs to get done**.
- **Past thinkers** can excel at seeing has **worked well so far**.

Leaders should know the **value and traps** of **each time orientation**, and be able to help our teams **move between all three** as needed, just like we must help them move between sentiments. We should also see and manage any **conflicts** between our preferred orientation and jobs.

You can take a free online 18-question test at [MindTime](#)¹¹ to assess your preferences. The **center of the graphic** is 33/33/33%. For example, the “**You**” depicted at right (myself) tends to be a **Future>Past>Present thinker** (roughly 40% Future, 35% Past, 25% Present in **thinking frequency**, estimated by deviation from the center).



Question

3A. How would you rank (1,2,3) **your personal strength** (or at least, the time you spend) in each of these three time orientations during a typical work week? Do you have a **balance** of people who prefer each time orientation on your **team**? If not, how can you get that balance?

- Past Thinking (Trends, Facts, Constraints)** _____
- Future Thinking (Uncertainties, Options, Visions)** _____
- Present Thinking (Plans, Expectations, Processes)** _____

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The Four Ps of Future Thinking

Both **time orientation** and **sentiment preferences** often **bias us** to think about the future in four very important ways.

Past thinkers like **Probable** futures.
Future thinkers like **Possible** futures.
Optimists like **Preferable** futures.
Pessimists like **Preventable** futures.

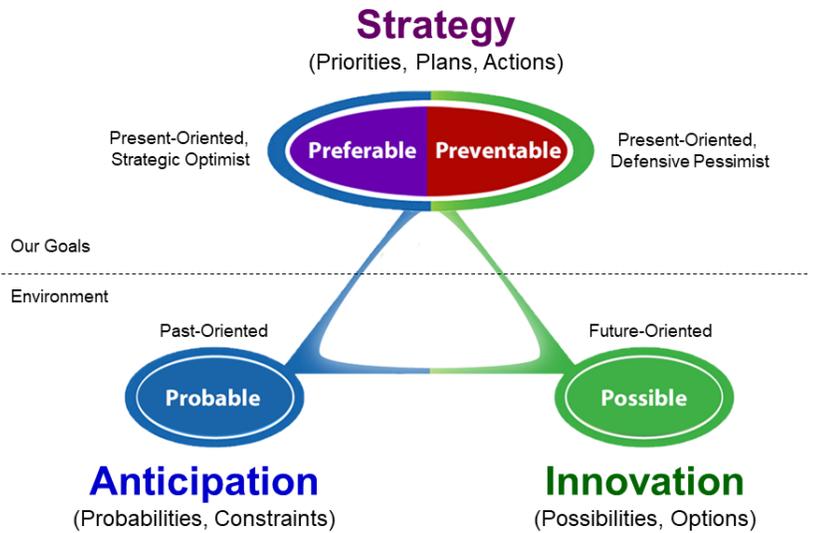
All Four Ps are necessary to leadership. **Probable** and **Possible** futures are controlled by **our environment** (by **predictable** and **unpredictable** physical processes, respectively). The better we see those, the better we can create and achieve **Preferable** and **Preventable**

futures. Those are controlled **by us**. As the **Four Ps Pyramid** above shows, mental contrasting about **positive** and **negative** futures is our **highest value activity** (“top of the pyramid”). These four future thinking types can be further **simplified** into **Three Skills: Anticipation** (Probability thinking), **Innovation** (Possibility thinking), and **Strategy** (Priority and Contrast thinking).¹⁷

Question

3B. How would you rank (1,2,3) **your team’s strength** in each of these Three Skills? Do you have **individual teammates** who rank #1 for each of these skills? Do you think your team uses each of these future thinking skills appropriately? Where could they most improve?

Anticipation Thinking (Facts, Trends, Constraints) _____
Innovation Thinking (Uncertainties, Options, Visions) _____
Strategy Thinking (Goals, Threats, Priorities, Plans) _____



The Four Ps (Three Skills) of Future Thinking

4. The Do Loop (Foresight-Action Cycle)

All of us use a **four step cycle (loop)**, to survive. **Cognitive science** calls it the “perception-action”, or “**Foresight-Action**” cycle¹². We use this loop both unconsciously and consciously throughout our day to build our **competencies**. We call it the “**Do loop**”.

Here are the four steps:

Learning – Understanding Past & Present

Foresight – Future thinking (four types)

Action – Doing (three types)

Review – After Action Feedback

Every time we **complete** one of these mental (Foresight) and physical (Action) loops, with **good feedback** (Review), and start again, we have a chance to **grow in competency**.

Question

4A. Do you or your team tend to **underuse, overuse, or misuse** any of these steps in **specific contexts**? How would you **grade your team (A-D)** on each of the four steps, in general?

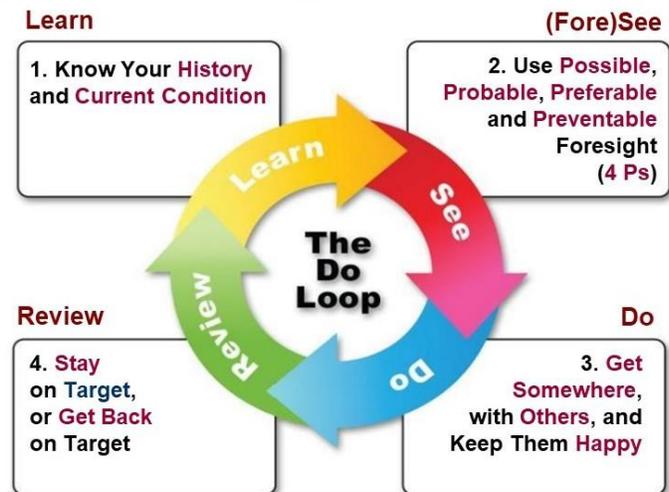
Learning Step _____

Action Step _____

Foresight Step _____

Reviewing Step _____

Please give an example of a **challenge you manage** in relation to this **universal loop**:



The OODA Loop

In rapid-response settings, Air Force Col. **John Boyd** named this loop the **OODA loop** (**Observe=Review, Orient=Learning; Decide=Foresight; Act=Action;**). The OODA loop is key to **competitive dominance** and survival in a **threat environment**. Boyd said the **frequency, strength, and quality** of this loop are the **key factors** determining performance.^{13,14,15,16}

Question

4B. Where have you seen the **OODA loop** used in your **law enforcement career** before? Is it new to you? What **strategies** might you employ with your team to improve the **frequency, strength and quality** of your team’s critical **foresight-action loops**? What are the typical **time horizons** (minutes, hours, days, weeks, months) over which you **review** your team’s most critical loops?

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5. Eight Skills of Effective Teams

When *acting with others*, our **Do loop** expands to **Eight Skills of team foresight and action**. The first four are **Foresight Skills**, and the last four are **Action Skills**. The picture at right shows that the **Four Foresight Skills** use alternating divergent and convergent thinking. The **Four Action Skills** use translational, one-to-many, network, and cycle thinking. In our view, these **Eight Skills** are **key competencies** effective leaders must take responsibility for in adaptive organizations.¹⁷

Running our Do Loop:
Eight Key Skills for Adaptive Leaders and Teams



Mnemonic: Does your team have a “**LAISEIRR focus**” on its **opportunities** and **challenges**?

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Learning - Investigative thinking (History & Current Status) | Foresight Prep |
| 2. Anticipation - Probability thinking (Expectations & Constraints) | Foresight |
| 3. Innovation – Possibility thinking (Ideas & Innovations) | Foresight |
| 4. Strategy – Preference & Prevention thinking (Priorities & Plans) | Foresight |
| 5. Execution – Production thinking (Getting Somewhere) | Action |
| 6. Influence – Market thinking (Recruiting Others) | Action |
| 7. Relating – Team thinking (Sustaining Your Teams) | Action |
| 8. Reviewing – Adjustment thinking (Staying on Target) | After Action Review |

Questions

5A. Which **three** of the Eight Skills do you feel are **your strengths**? How have they **helped you** in the past? In what contexts have you **underused**, **overused** or **misused** them? What have been their “**traps**”? Be prepared to **discuss this question with your small team** in seminar.

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5B. Which **two** of the Eight Skills seem **least natural**, most ignored, or most challenging for **you**? Has any weakness in these skills hurt you in the past? How so? Have you tried to **balance out** or improve **your** own or your **team's** weaker skills? How did that go? Have a **success/failure story** there to share? Be prepared to **discuss this question with your small team** in seminar.

5C. Bonus Question (If we have time, or on your own later): Use **GRASP thinking** on the **Eight Skills**. What is a good **Goal** to **help your team** improve their use of **any or all of these skills** over the **next six months**? How will you measure progress (**Reality**)? What **Advantages** might the team get from improving? What **Setbacks** (obstacles) are you most likely to encounter? What **key resources** (coaches, routines, top cover) and **if-then statements** are in your **Plan**?

Thanks for doing this tough foresight work. Can I be of help? Email me at ejsmart@nps.edu

References

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