

Foresight Skills Assessment: Personal and Team (Mini Version)

Instructions: Prior to class, please skim this six-page handout and briefly answer the five (multi-part) questions. This is tough introspective work, about you and your teams. Some questions may seem abstract, or make you uncomfortable. That is normal, try to answer them anyway. Your answers will be confidential. In class, share only what you wish. Feel free to also write down any questions of your own. We can discuss those in class, or by email at john@foresightu.com

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** (from past success). They guard against **overpessimism**, with its **negativity** and **inaction** (learned helplessness).¹ They also get skilled at using **praise and criticism (sentiment feedback)**, giving out each in relation to **effort or progress**, not abilities or conditions. This reinforces a **growth mindset** in members of your team.⁴

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 states in a typical work week?

Advantage Thinking (Strategic Optimism) _____
Defensive Thinking (Defensive Pessimism) _____
Contrast Thinking (Balancing Each/“Realism”) _____

Would you say you are sometimes too optimistic? Too pessimistic? Too “balanced” in your sentiments about things in your work or personal life? Briefly explain:

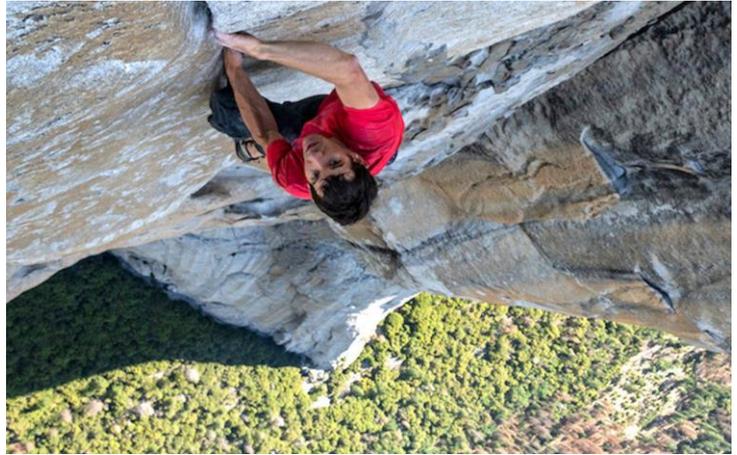
Do you tend to give out praise or criticism in relation to effort or progress, or more in relation to current abilities or conditions? Do you ever insufficiently use praise and criticism with your team? In what contexts? Briefly explain:

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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:

1. **Key resources** (mental, physical, network) that will help us **succeed** in our plan, and
2. **If-then statements** regarding how to deal with potential **obstacles** or **setbacks**, if they occur while executing the plan.



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

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**.

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

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.

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Question

1B. For 5 mins, try **GRASP thinking** on a difficult upcoming **short-term** (anything from tomorrow to the next three months) **personal or career task or goal**. It can be a **tough task** you have **committed to doing next** or one of your **more challenging 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)

Which of these five thinking steps was **hardest** for you? How did **GRASP** differ, if at all, from what you **presently do in your head** when planning **daily and weekly tasks and goals**? How could you **test GRASP vs. non-GRASP effectiveness** in your daily or weekly plans?

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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 (O:P) thinking ratios**, and they can use **routines** to **shift their O:P ratio** whenever it seems counterproductive (too pessimistic or too optimistic).

1. To empower your **strategic optimists**, and defeat **inflexibility** and **fear**, leaders can do **Success Visioning (Stretch Goalsetting)**, asking their team: “Who (not us) is getting which **advantages**? What is the **best outcome** we can realistically **achieve**? In what **timeframe**?”
2. To empower your **defensive pessimists**, and defeat **groupthink** and **ego**, leaders can look for **disruptions** and **risks** (threats) and do **Failure Visioning (Premortems)**, asking: “Imagine this (high-profile project) has **failed** or **greatly underperformed**. **How** did it happen?”⁵
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?”⁶

Question

- 1C.** Can you describe a situation where **your team** or **another team** got in trouble by **underusing, overusing, or misusing strategic optimism, defensive pessimism**, or being too focused on **balancing** these sentiments (“**realism**”)? Briefly explain:

In general, does your team need to **improve** its use of any of these **sentiment states**, in any **context**? How might you help them do that? Briefly explain:

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2. The Do Loop (Foresight-Action Loop, LFAR Loop)

All of us use a **critical cycle** to survive. **Cognitive science** calls it the “perception-action”, or “**Foresight-Action**” cycle⁷. We use this loop unconsciously and consciously all day long. The **Do loop (LFAR loop)** has four steps:

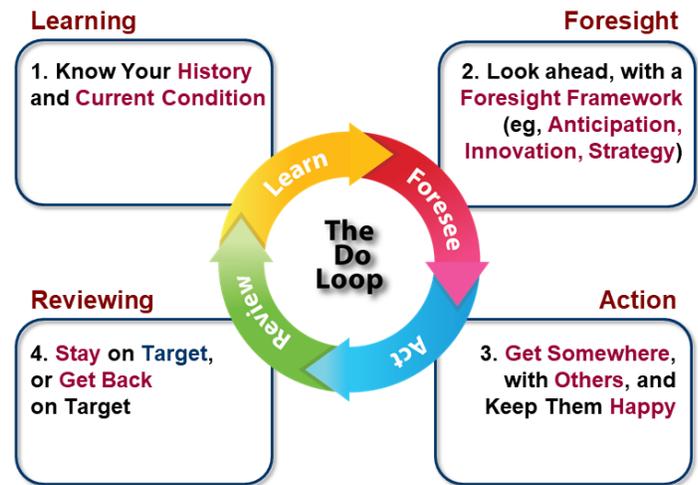
Learning – Seeing Relevant Past & Present

Foresight – Looking Ahead (four types)

Action – Doing (three types)

Review – Getting Good Feedback

Every time we **complete** one of these loops, with good after action **Review**, and start again, we have a chance to **grow our competency** (ability). We all tend to **overuse** our stronger steps in this loop, and **underuse** our weaker steps. The **four boxes** in the **picture at right** briefly explain each step. They will be discussed in class.



In rapid-response settings, Air Force Col. **John Boyd** named the **LFAR loop** the **OODA loop** (**O**bserve=**R**eview, **O**rient=**L**earning; **D**ecide=**F**oresight; **A**ct=**A**ction;). The OODA loop is key to **competitive dominance** and survival in a **threat environment**. Boyd said the **frequency, strength, and quality** (“**FSQ**”) of this loop are **key factors** determining performance.^{8,9,10}

Question

2A. In general, how would you **grade yourself (A-D)** on use of each of the four LFAR steps?

1. Learning (discovering relevant past and present) _____
2. Foresight (seeing futures, making strategy, plans) _____
3. Action (executing, influencing, relationships) _____
4. Reviewing (gaining timely and relevant feedback) _____

For your **lowest grade step(s)**, what **factors** have most contributed to your **low self-grade**? In the past, what **factors** (internal or external) have helped you **occasionally** give yourself a **higher grade** on that step/those steps? In what **specific contexts**?

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2B. In general, how would you grade your team (A-D) on each of these steps?

Learning Step _____

Action Step _____

Foresight Step _____

Reviewing Step _____

Which daily or weekly Do loop(s) (eg, in which action responsibility areas) are the most critical for your team? See if you can list at least three. Now number them in priority order.

What strategies might you use with your team to improve the strength and/or quality of their weakest LFAR steps? How can you keep them from overusing their favorite steps?

Who (You? Team? Others?) gives them feedback? How could such reviewing be improved?

What about frequency? Does your team need to get faster or slower running any of their Do loops in some contexts? Which ones? How can you help them speed up or slow down?

Thanks for doing this tough foresight work. I'm looking forward to learning from all of you in class.

References

¹ Martin Seligman, [Learned Optimism](#), 2006.

² Julie Norem, [The Positive Power of Negative Thinking: Using Defensive Pessimism](#), 2002.

³ Gabriele Oettingen, [Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation](#), 2014.

⁴ Dweck, [Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential](#), 2017.

⁵ Gary Klein, [Performing a Project Premortem](#), *Harvard Business Review*, 2007.

⁶ Dilip Jeste, [Wiser: The Scientific Roots of Wisdom, Compassion, and What Makes Us Good](#), 2020.

⁷ Pecher and Zwaan, [Grounding Cognition: The Perception and Action Cycle](#), 2010.

⁸ Grant Hammond, [The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security](#), 2004.

⁹ Daniel Ford, [A Vision So Noble: John Boyd, the OODA Loop, and America's War on Terror](#), 2010

¹⁰ Chet Richards, [Certain to Win: The Strategy of John Boyd Applied to Business](#), 2004.