

Mental Models

The Key to Making Reality-Based Decisions

Elements and Characteristics of a Mental Model

- ✓ Set of fundamental assumptions (these must be accurate assumptions!)
- ✓ Consistent, predictable behaviors based on your assumptions
- ✓ Are usually incomplete and evolve constantly.
- ✓ Usually contain some errors and contradictions.
- ✓ Usually provide simplified explanations for complex situations.
- ✓ Are usually based on a degree of vagueness that allows them to be used even if incorrect.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Mental Models

Benefit	Drawback
Serve as an information filter; make you more efficient at processing information.	Blind you to facts and ideas that challenge or defy your deeply held beliefs.
Result in logical consequences and predictable behaviors, decisions, and actions.	Divert your attention from important information or cues in your environment; can cause you to disregard the evidence in front of your face.
Eliminate internal confusion; can simplify a complicated strategy.	Are not always accurate when you generalize from one type of action or behavior to another.

Origins of Mental Models

- Influence of others: education, books, mass culture
- Personal experience: successes/failures, resilience vs. defeatism
- Rewards and incentives: tangible and intangible

Use Creative Swiping

- ✓ Look at innovative ideas in other industries that you can adapt.
- ✓ What industry can you study for ideas? What can you adapt from that industry?
- ✓ Use different approaches to achieve the same goal
- ✓ What other uses can you find for your existing products and services?
- ✓ How can you combine them to come up with something new or different from your competition?

Typical Mental Mistakes

- ✓ Confirmation bias: Noticing evidence that supports your mental model and overlook or disregard evidence that is inconsistent with your mental model.
- ✓ Remaining attached to what made you successful in the first place.
- ✓ Not trying what your mental model tells you is bad or impossible.
- ✓ Focusing on the current market/competitive situation and fail to anticipate the future.

Be Willing to Change

- Identify why change is necessary.
- Emotionally detach from your existing mental model.
- If you're feeling resistant, try to identify the underlying issue(s).
- Tune in. Listen to what people are saying inside and outside your organization.
- Look for new opportunities.
- Challenge yourself to come up with a specified number of new ideas. Schedule structured brainstorming sessions.
- Appreciative inquiry

Reverse Your Assumption

- State your assumption: Having to collect sales tax will be disastrous for business.
- Reverse the assumption and write the opposite: Having to collect sales tax will be prosperous for business.
- Consider the actions/behaviors/consequences of the opposite assumption.
- What information does that provide about the accuracy of your assumption?

Stand alone or as part of a Coaching Engagement.

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