

## **Supplemental Appendix 1**

### **Practice Guides for Four Systems Thinking Frameworks**

Question Guide to Accompany Core Theory of Success

Question Guide to Accompany Creative Tension Model

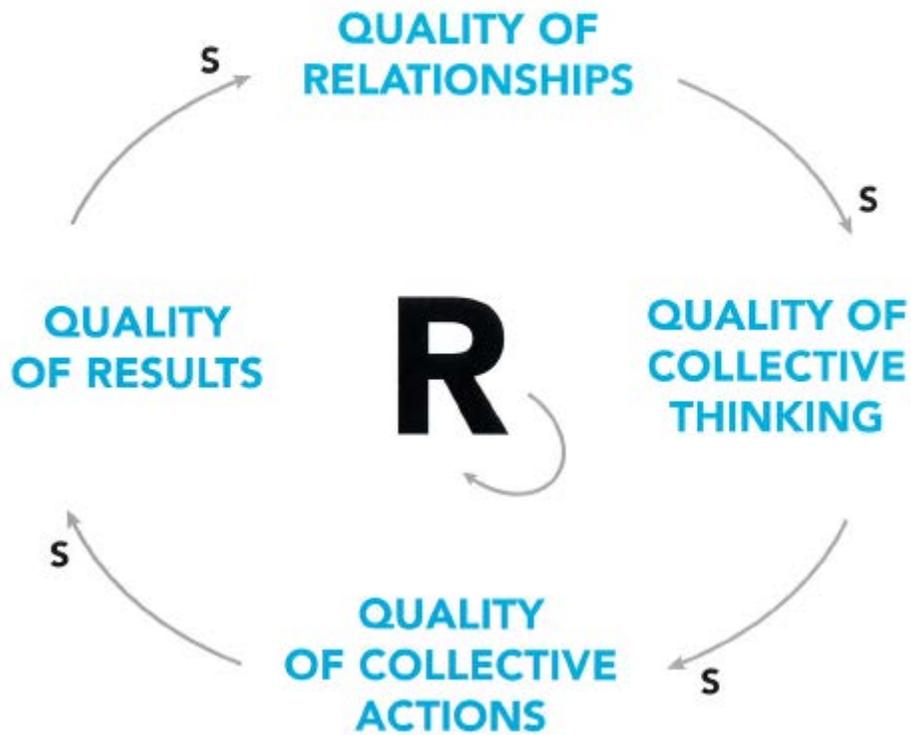
Question Guide to Accompany Hierarchy of Choices

Question Guide to Accompany Levels of Perspective

Introduction to the Ladder of Inference

# Question Guide to Accompany

## Core Theory of Success



**“Core Theory of Success”** from:

Daniel Kim, *Organizing for Learning*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, 2001, p. 87.

**Question guide** developed by Kathleen A. Zurcher. For more information contact her at [kzurcher33@gmail.com](mailto:kzurcher33@gmail.com)

## This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide a partial list of questions that can help groups apply the Core Theory of Success to their work, from planning to sustaining results. At different points in the evolution of your group and its work, different questions will be appropriate.

The Model, from *Organizing for Learning*:

“...as the *quality of relationships* among people who work together increases (high team spirit, mutual respect, and trust), the *quality of thinking* improves (people consider more facets of an issue and share a greater number of different perspectives). When the level of thinking is heightened, the *quality of actions* is likely to improve (better planning, greater coordination, and higher commitment). In turn, the *quality of results* increases as well. Achieving high quality results as a team generally has a positive effect on the *quality of relationships*, thus creating a virtuous cycle of better and better results.

### Quality of Relationships

- What is the quality of relationships among people in our community that would facilitate collaborating to create our preferred future?
- What is the quality of relationships diverse community members need to think and work together effectively?
- What quality of relationships will allow people to honestly express their own perspectives and hear those of others?
- Who needs to be in relationship with one another in order to create lasting change in the community? Who is or will be affected by the system we seek to transform?
- Who has typically been excluded from conversations and leadership roles in this issue? How can we engage them respectfully now?
- What is the quality of relationship we want among youth and adults engaged together as partners?
- As we convene the group, what practices will we use to build the quality of relationships? What intentional practices will we use for:
  - making the first contact
  - extending an invitation
  - setting the room environment
  - helping people get to know one another in the context of their mutual work on this issue
  - modeling the kind of relationships we hope to establish among the members of the group
  - continuously building and maintaining relationships
  - communicating before, during, and after each conversation or work session
- What will be the effects on the quality of relationships of the time and place we choose to meet? Consider effects of:
  - Geographic location

- Quality of the space—comfort and flexibility of seating, lighting, sound, cleanliness, accessibility for all ages and abilities, availability of needed equipment, work space for the group and small groups, access to support services ( for example, rest rooms, refreshments, copying, parking, public transportation), safety for all group members.
- Owner of the space—Who may be more likely or less likely to participate due to space being owned by a particular organization?
- Time of day set for meetings—Who may be more likely or less likely to participate due to the time of meetings? What groups are being systematically included or excluded depending on the time?
- What temporary enhancements can we make to the meeting space that will enhance the quality of relationships?
- What will we do to sustain the quality of relationships throughout the life of this work, and beyond?
  - What communication strategies will we employ?
  - What will we do to maintain the quality of relationships during transitions in group membership? How will we recognize the departure of members? How will we orient and bring new partners into the group in ways that are effective for them, build new relationships effectively, and maintain relationships among group members?
- How will we assess whether we have built and sustained high quality relationships?
  - What indicators and patterns will we assess over time? How do we expect those patterns to change? How will we collect the information we need for the group to decide whether they need to take additional steps to build their quality of relationships?
  - At what intervals will the group step back and assess their quality of relationships?
  - How will we mark milestones in the relationships?

### Quality of Collective Thinking

- What is the quality of collective thinking we need in order to create the most effective plan for our community?
- What questions will engage group members in the thinking that we need at this time?
- What question, if asked of this group, would profoundly change the nature of the conversation and collective thinking?
- What questions will reveal areas of agreement or beliefs, assumptions, and ideas (mental models) we hold in common?
- What questions will reveal areas where we have divergent beliefs, assumptions, and ideas (mental models)?
- What questions will move us to consider the “root of the root” of the issues we are addressing?
- What tools and approaches can we employ to assure that diverse voices and a wide range of perspective are heard? Consider:

- Designing conversations and work sessions in ways that will help to reduce positional power differences among participants
- Establishing group guidelines for participation that incorporate multiple cultural practices and are appropriate for all ages
- Designing work sessions based on systems thinking tools (for example, Hierarchy of Choices, Levels of Perspective/Vision Deployment Matrix, creating Key Success Loops/causal loop diagrams)
- Structuring conversations using a variety of methods (for example, World Café, Generative Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space, U-Process)
- What approaches will we use for our plan (for example, Community Action Plan; visual representations; physical models)?
- Who is the most appropriate person to facilitate conversations so that all members can participate fully?
  - When do we need a skilled facilitator who is not a member of the group? What knowledge and skills do we want that person to have?
  - When can we facilitate our own conversations?
  - What are the intended and unintended consequences of having one of the group members facilitate the conversation? Of having someone outside the group facilitate?
- What are the pressures that the group might feel to move from thinking to action too quickly? What questions will we use to help refocus our attention on collective thinking?
- What questions can help to move the group from a reactive mindset to a creative one?
- What questions will keep the group focused on the future they want to create?
- What questions will elicit an assessment of the positive and negative aspects of current reality, but without putting the group in a reactive mindset?
- What room set-up will we use to enhance our ability to think together collectively?
- What will we do to create a hospitable and productive room environment in service of collective thinking? Consider:
  - Arranging chairs to enhance all participants seeing one another
  - Positioning seating in the room in order to change the shape of the useable space (e.g., using one end of a long-narrow room in order to create a circle, rather than a slender oval)
  - Using flipcharts, markers, and wall space to draw and post ideas, represent our thinking, and to invite all participants to add to the work
  - Bringing color, light, artwork, objects that can be manipulated, snacks, etc. into the room to build energy and creativity
  - Having an appropriate temperature in the room
  - Having materials available and organized for participants, including paper, pens, and other supply items
- How will we document and communicate our collective thinking, for ourselves and others?
  - What will we do to document the collective thinking of the group? During the conversation? As a record of our thinking, agreements, and plans?
  - How will members of the group have access to the record?

- What will be communicated outside of the group? For what purpose? In what form? When?

### Quality of Collective Actions

- What is the vision we want to achieve together?
- What are our strategies and tactics for achieving our vision?
- What are the relationships among each proposed action and our strategies and tactics?
- What might be the unintended consequences of our proposed actions?
- What actions can be taken by individuals and organizations separately, and what needs to be done collectively?
- What process will we use to decide who has which responsibilities and what kind of authority?
- How are we accountable to one another?
- How will we communicate with one another about actions, timelines, resources, and outcomes?
- What is our plan for assessing the effectiveness of our actions for achieving our vision?
  - Each action or activity? Relationships among them?
  - The effects of one action/activity on the whole?
- How will we identify gaps between achieving our vision and the complex relationships of effects of actions as we implement them?
  - What milestones will we monitor?
  - What is our process for making adjustments in strategies and modifying action plans?
- What opportunities continue to emerge?
  - Which opportunities are in alignment with our vision and strategies?
  - Who will decide which to pursue and what is the process for deciding?
  - What are the costs of pursuing the opportunity? What are the costs of not pursuing it?

### Quality of Results

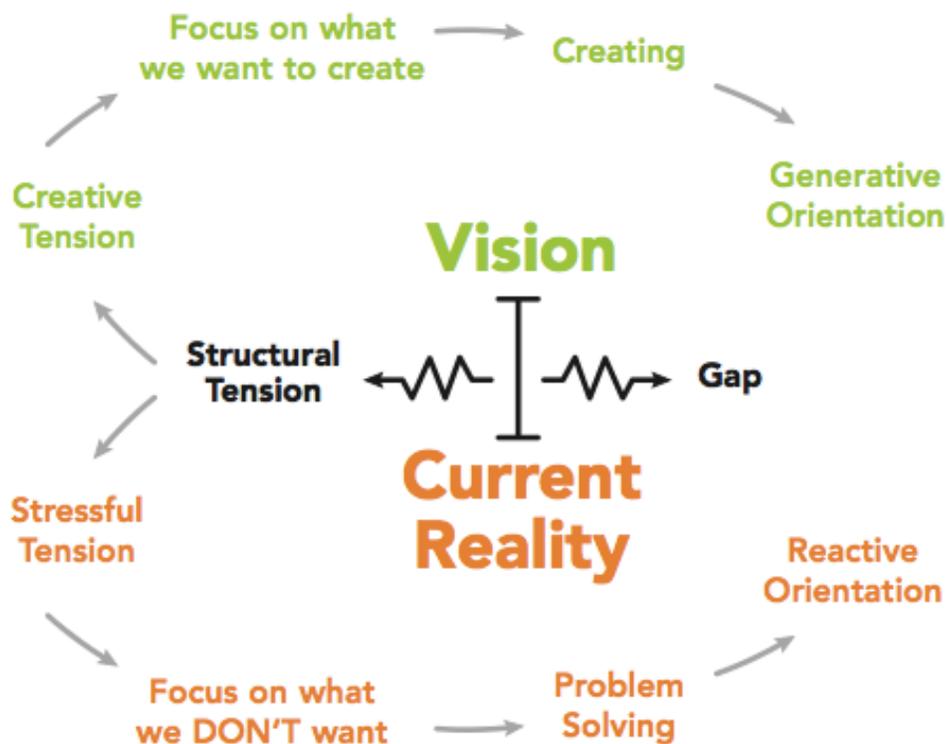
- What indicators will help us assess whether we are moving toward our vision?
- What has been the past patterns-over-time of these indicators? What are the patterns-over-time we would expect to see as we move toward our vision? How will they change?
- What capacities have we developed that will sustain this work and enhance other work?
- What have we learned so far that can inform and improve future work?
  - What worked well this time?
  - What didn't work as well this time?
  - What would we do differently next time? What results would we expect by doing this differently?
- What are our successes?
  - What relationships have contributed to our success?

- What resources have been developed and what resources have we used to achieve these successes?
- What have we learned about our theory of change?
  - Where have we adapted it? With what results?
- What advice would we give to others who are pursuing work such as ours?

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# Question Guide to Accompany Creative Tension Model



Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory. (Adapted from Robert Fritz, 1989, *The Path of Least Resistance*)

## **Creative Tension Model:**

Developed by Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory. Adapted from Robert Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life*. New York: Ballard Books, 1989.

Model illustration from *It Begins Here: Organizational Learning Journey Toolkit*.

Compiled and designed by W.K. Kellogg Foundation in collaboration with Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory. Copyright 2006, Daniel H. Kim. Available from Cobee Trading Company in Singapore, [www.cobee.com.sg](http://www.cobee.com.sg).

**Question guide** developed by Kathleen A. Zurcher. For more information contact her at [kzurcher33@gmail.com](mailto:kzurcher33@gmail.com)

## This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide a partial list of powerful questions that can help groups apply the Creative Tension Model to their work. At different points in the evolution of your group and its work, different questions will be appropriate.

## The Model

From *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* :

“The juxtaposition of vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want) generates what we call ‘creative tension’: a force to bring them together, caused by the natural tendency of tension to seek resolution.”  
(Senge, 2008, p. 132)

### Vision

- Who needs to be part of the process of creating shared vision for our community, team, project or work?
  - Who has been historically excluded from determining the future of the community? How can we engage them respectfully now?
  - How will we engage youth as leaders, partners and full participants in imagining the future for our community?
  - What sectors of the community (or organization) typically have not worked together, but should be part of the conversation about the shared vision for the future we want to create? Who is the best person or what is the best group to secure their engagement in creating our shared vision?
- What is the future we truly care about creating for children and families in our community?
- If we could create things the way we want them to be, what would that look like?
- When we reach our vision, what will children and families experience?
  - As concretely and with as much detail as possible, what will youth and adults see, hear, do, and feel in the community of our vision?
  - It is ten years from now and our vision has become reality. A reporter comes to the community to see the results. What does the reporter write or say about daily life in the community?
- What events will be capturing the attention of people in our community ten years from now because the vision has been successfully achieved?

### Current Reality

**In the context of our shared vision, what aspects of current reality are relevant to our work? (Note: *Not everything in current reality is relevant to your area of focus.*)**

- What is happening now in our community (or organization/team)?
- What events are capturing our attention?
- What patterns do we see emerging?
  - Which patterns are troubling? Why?
  - Which patterns are hopeful? Why?

- What are children and families currently experiencing in their lives?
  - As concretely and with as much detail as possible, **currently** what do youth and adults see, hear, do, and feel in the community compared to the future that is possible in our vision?
- What aspects of current reality can be leveraged to support achieving the vision?
- What resources currently exist that we can redirect toward the group's desired future?

### Structural Tension/Creative Tension/Stressful Tension

Structural tension is the source of the creative tension and creative energy that will lead to the shared vision we want.

- What questions or approaches will help us live with the tension that results from the gap and remain focused on what we want to create?
- What events, information, and pressures might move us into a reactive orientation? What approaches can be used to refocus on what we want to create together and maintain a generative orientation?
- What is the source of our discomfort with the gap between vision and current reality?

### Problem Solving/Reactive Orientation

- What is the source of our impatience with the speed of the process of creating and working toward our shared vision?
- What well-intentioned quick-fixes or piece-meal solutions have been tried in the past?
  - In light of these efforts, resources used, and the valiant efforts of talented people, why are we still experiencing problems in current reality?
  - What have been the unintended negative consequences of some of the solutions we have tried?
- Why, despite our best efforts, is current reality not meeting our expectations?
- What aspects of current reality are pulling us into a reactive, problem-solving response? What can we do to reduce anxiety, while maintaining a focus on creating?

### Creating/Generative Orientation

- What commitment are we willing to make in order to achieve the future we truly want to create?
- If resources were not a concern, what would we create together in service of our shared vision?
- What already exists today that we could build on to create the future we want for families and children in our community?
- Who else shares our passion for creating this vision? How can we bring them into partnership with us?

### Maintaining a Focus on the Creative Path

- What will achieving our shared vision contribute to the lives of children and families in our community?
- How long have the patterns we're seeing now in our community existed? What is a reasonable time, then, for us to take to achieve the shared vision we've committed to?
- What has already begun to move toward our preferred future, simply through the act of creating a shared vision?
- What will we do to document and communicate emerging changes and milestones on the path to making our vision a reality?

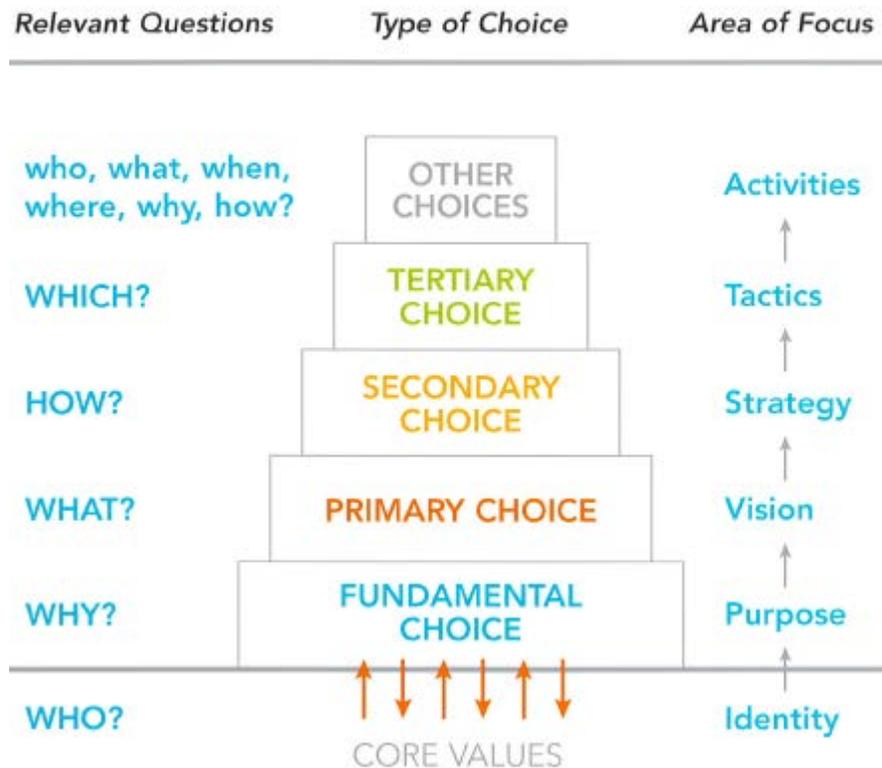
### References and Resources

Fritz, Robert. *The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1989.

Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday, 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed).

# Question Guide to Accompany

## Hierarchy of Choices



### Hierarchy of Choices from:

Daniel Kim, *Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership*. Indianapolis, IN: The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, 2002, p.16.

Model illustration from *It Begins Here: Organizational Learning Journey Toolkit*. Compiled and designed by W.K. Kellogg Foundation in collaboration with Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory. Copyright 2014, Daniel H. Kim. Available from Cobee Trading Company in Singapore, [www.cobee.com.sg](http://www.cobee.com.sg).

**Question guide** developed by Kathleen A. Zurcher. For more information contact her at [kzurcher33@gmail.com](mailto:kzurcher33@gmail.com)

## This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide a partial list of powerful questions that can help groups apply the Hierarchy of Choices model to their work. At different points in the evolution of a group and its work, different questions will be appropriate. Select the questions from each section that will be most effective for your group.

## The Model

From *Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership* (Kim, 2002):

Choice plays an important role in vision. If we never exercise choice, we will forever stay in a state of wanting things without ever taking steps toward attaining them. It is the conscious choice to bring something into reality that transforms an idle dream into a vision that has the power to tap into people's energy and commitment.

In his book, *The Path of Least Resistance*, Robert Fritz differentiates between making Fundamental, Primary, and Secondary Choices. Fritz points out that it is very difficult to make choices at one level if we have not yet made choices at the level below it.

When every member of the team (or organization) has internalized the core values and purpose of the team and has a clear picture of the result they are striving for, they will be guided every step of the way by the clarity of these choices at the foundational levels.

Hierarchy of Choices is a useful model for structuring strategic planning using a generative, systemic approach. It applies equally well to the work of a group of community members and to an entire organization. One significant result of applying this model is building a strong foundation for aligned action.

Generally as we apply this model, we begin with purpose and core values and proceed through vision. At the point that we move to strategies, we take a side step and apply the Vision Deployment Matrix, VDM (based on Levels of Perspective). After completing a VDM for our work, we have the shared analysis and agreements that result in strong strategies, tactics, and activities that support achieving our vision.

Daniel Kim reports that he typically begins with an initial conversation about purpose, but then quickly returns to deeper conversation about Core Values that would serve that purpose. However, this guide is organized starting at the bottom of the model.

Core Values: Who are we? (The foundation for our work)

- What values are so essential to our work that they are core to our identity?
- Which values will underlie and be reflected in every decision, action, and communication about our work?
- If values are the DNA of collective work, what is our DNA?
- What implications does our purpose have for the core values that we will embrace?

Purpose: Why do we exist? (Fundamental Choice)

- Why does this group exist?
- What is our one, central reason for being? (Not HOW do we do things—what is the purpose of our work together?)

Vision: What do we want to create together? (Primary Choice)

- Who needs to participate in providing thinking and leadership for developing our vision for the future?
  - Who has been historically excluded from conversations? How will we engage them respectfully?
  - In what ways will we authentically engage youth as partners, leaders, and decision makers?
  - How can we assure that the collaborators effectively represent diverse people and thinking in the community?
  - What will we do to assure community involvement throughout this work?
- If we pursue our purpose and live by our values, what future will we create?
- What is the vision we want to achieve together?
- What is the future we truly care about creating for children and families in our community?
- If we could create things the way we want them to be, what would that look like?
- When we reach our vision, what will people experience? What will they see, hear, do, and feel in their daily lives?
- What is the future toward which we would be willing to commit our time and resources?
- What are our anticipated long-term outcomes?

Strategies: How will we go about achieving our vision? (Secondary Choice)

- What long-term approaches will we employ together to achieve and sustain our shared vision?
- What is our collective picture of the system when it is fully functioning and creating the future we want?
  - What are the causal relationships among the parts of the system?
  - What are the key success factors that will influence our ability to achieve our vision? What are the causal relationships among those factors? In

other words, what is the self-reinforcing success loop we are trying to create?

- Where are the longest delays between a change in one part of the system and its influence on the next? How might we reduce the delays through investments of various resources?
- What investments will we make to create the future we envision?
- What is our theory (what are our mental models) about how change will occur to move from current reality to our vision?
  - What is our collective thinking about how the strategies we identify will result in the future we envision?
  - What is the relationship among the strategies we are considering?
  - What strategies have we decided against? With what consequence?
  - What formal and informal policies can be adopted to help create the future we seek?
  - What practices will we adopt or change to create our preferred future?
- What is the appropriate sequence or phasing for our strategies?
  - Which strategies are dependent on other strategies for their effectiveness?
  - What resources do we have available, compared to what resources are needed for each strategy?
  - For which strategies do we need to create readiness before we can pursue them?
- What will we assess to know whether our strategies are having the intended effects on the system, and to make adjustments as frequently as needed? How often will we consider making adjustments in strategies?
- What might be some unintended consequences of choosing to implement the strategies we are considering? What can we build into our strategies to monitor effects and to reduce the likelihood or the impact of these consequences?
- What is the role of communications in these strategies?
- **See “Question Guide to Accompany Levels of Perspective” for a more detailed set of questions for identifying strategies.**

Tactics: Which actions will we take to carry out each strategy?

(Tertiary Choice)

- Which shorter-term approaches will we use to implement our strategies?
  - Which should come earlier in our sequence?
  - Which should come later?
- What timely opportunities, consistent with our strategies, are available now?
  - Which opportunities are in alignment with our vision and strategies
  - What are the costs of pursuing the opportunity? What are the costs of not pursuing it?
  - Of those available, which will we pursue?
- What resources, including partners and expertise, will we need to implement strategies? How will we secure these resources?

Activities: Who will do what? When? Where? Why? How? (Other Choices)

- What illustrative examples of activities and actions add clarity to our plan, recognizing that specific activities will be identified and planned throughout implementation?
- To what extent does each proposed activity clearly carry out a tactic and strategy, in service of achieving our shared vision?
- Who will lead implementation of each activity?
- When will we implement each activity? What is the sequence that we believe is practical and useful?
- Where is the most appropriate place to carry out the activity?
- What resources do we have available to us? Which activities are highest priorities to implement with the available resources?

#### References and Resources

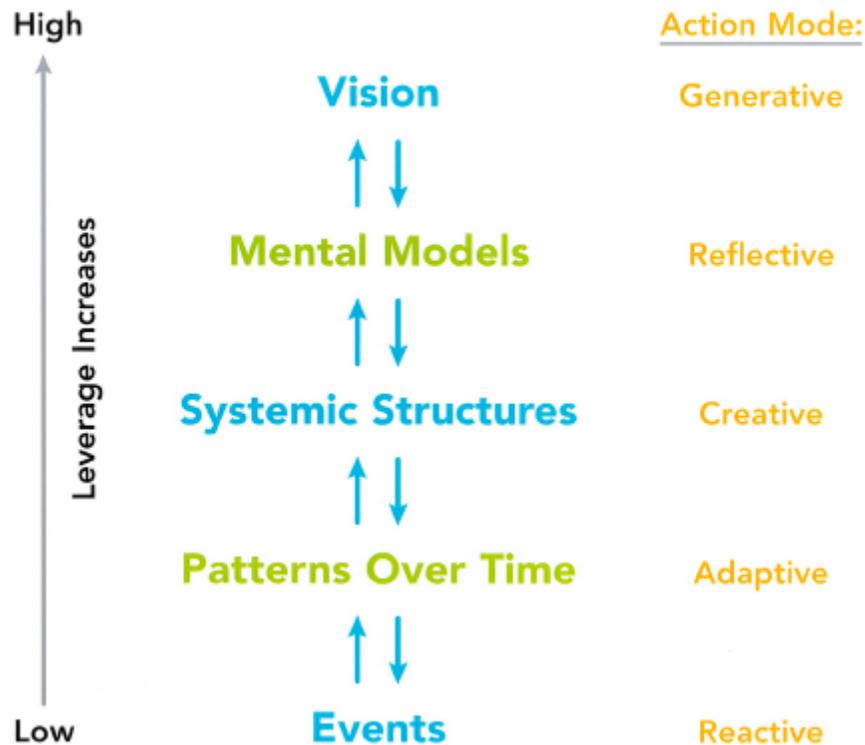
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Kim, Daniel. *Foresight as the Central Ethic of Leadership*. Indianapolis, IN: The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, 2002, p. 16.

Zurcher, Kathleen A. "Question Guide to Accompany Levels of Perspective", 2017.

# Question Guide to Accompany

## Levels of Perspective



### Levels of Perspective Model from:

Daniel Kim, *Organizing for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, 2001, pp. 93-103.

Model illustration from *It Begins Here: Organizational Learning Journey Toolkit*.

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## This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide a partial list of powerful questions that can help groups apply the Levels of Perspective and Vision Deployment Matrix models to their work. At different points in the evolution of a group and its work, different questions will be appropriate. Select the questions from each section that will be most effective for your group.

## The Model

From *Organizing for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change* (Kim, 2001):

“There are multiple levels from which we can view and perceive the world. From a systemic perspective, we are interested in five distinct levels—events, patterns of behavior, systemic structures, mental models, and vision.” (p. 99)

“All five levels are important for developing a systems thinking perspective, especially because we live in an event-oriented world, and our language is often rooted in that level.” (p. 100)

“One of the most important messages of the ‘Levels of Perspective’ framework is that we must recognize the level at which we are operating, and evaluate whether taking the corresponding action provides the highest leverage for that situation. Each level offers different opportunities for high-leverage action, but they also have their limits. The challenge is to choose the appropriate response for the immediate situation and find ways to change the future by operating at multiple levels in multiple action modes.” (p. 103)

The Levels of Perspective model is the essence of the Vision Deployment Matrix (VDM). For the VDM, Levels of Perspective is applied first to desired future and then to current reality. The gaps between desired future and current reality are the sources of strategies, tactics, and activities in the Hierarchy of Choices Model. VDM is a practical tool to guide collective thinking, as well as to move from vision to action.

“The Vision Deployment Matrix offers a schema for strategically planning how to cross the “chasm” between current reality and vision by painting a comprehensive picture of the desired future reality and current reality at five levels of perspective.” “This includes translating the ideals of vision into a practical reality that guides and affects not only the strategic thinking in the organization, but the day-to-day operations as well.” (Kim, 2001, p. 87)

## Vision Deployment Matrix (VDM) (Kim, 2001)

	Level of Perspective (Action Mode)	Desired Future Reality	Current Reality	Gaps, Open Issues, Questions	Action Steps	Indicators of Progress	Timeline
↑ Increasing Leverage	Vision (Generative)						
	Mental Models (Reflective)						
	Systemic Structures (Creative)						
	Patterns (Adaptive)						
	Events (Reactive)						

This guide includes Levels of Perspective questions for both Desired Future Reality and Current Reality.

### *Desired Future Reality*

#### Vision

- What is the vision we want to achieve together?
- What is the future we truly care about creating for children and families in our community?
- If we could create things the way we want them to be, what would that look like?
- When we reach our shared vision, what will people experience? What will they see, hear, do, and feel in their daily lives?
- What is the future toward which we would be willing to commit our time and resources?
- What is our intended impact? What long-term results do we want to achieve, and for whom?
- Who else shares our passion for creating this vision? How can we bring them into partnership with us?

#### Mental Models

- “What assumptions, beliefs, and values are needed to realize the vision?” (Kim, 2001, p. 94)
- What beliefs and assumptions support our shared vision?

- What beliefs and assumptions do we need to activate in ourselves and others if we are to achieve our vision? Who needs to hold them?
- What beliefs and assumptions are implicit or assumed in our shared vision?
- What theories about our community, the world around us, and how change happens are assumed in our vision?
- What assumptions about the future do we share that we need to make explicit in order to test whether others hold the same assumption?

### Systemic Structures

- What systems and structures will be consistent with our mental models?
  - What are the characteristics of those systems and structures?
  - What would our mental models look like if they were put into practice in a coherent system?
- What is our collective picture of the system when it is fully functioning and creating the future we want?
  - What are the causal relationships among the parts of the system?
  - What are the key success factors that will influence our ability to achieve our vision? What are the causal relationships among those factors? In other words, what is the self-reinforcing success loop we are trying to create?
- What policies (formal and informal) and practices will be part of the future system that will result in achieving our shared vision?
- “What kinds of systemic structures (either invented or redesigned) are required to operationalize the new mental models and achieve the vision?” (Kim, 2001, p. 94)

### Patterns Over Time

- What patterns will we monitor over time to know whether we are moving toward our shared vision?
- “What are some key indicators whose pattern of behavior shows that the desired vision is a reality?” (Kim, 2001, p. 94)
- What would we expect the patterns over time for key indicators to look like when we are making progress toward our vision?
- How will we track both positive and negative unintended consequences of the structures and systems we implement, and learn from them?

### Events

- When our vision has become current reality, what events do we anticipate we would see?
- When we reach our vision, what will children and families experience?
  - As concretely and with as much detail as possible, what will youth and adults see, hear, do, and feel in the community of our vision?
  - It is ten years from now and our vision has become reality. A reporter comes to the community to see the results. What does the reporter write or say about daily life in the community?

- What events will be capturing the attention of people in our community ten years from now because the vision has been successfully achieved?

### *Current Reality*

#### Events

- What is happening now related to our vision in our community? Be as specific as possible:
  - Who did or said what? When did this happen? With what impact on individuals, families, or the community?
  - What policies have been enacted? When? With what results?
- What are children and families currently experiencing in their lives?
  - As concretely and with as much detail as possible, **currently** what do youth and adults see, hear, do, and feel in the community compared to the future that is possible in our vision?
- What events related to our shared vision are capturing our attention?
- What are you experiencing? What are others experiencing?
- “What events characterize the current reality?” (Kim, 2000b)

#### Patterns Over Time

- What patterns have we seen emerging?
  - Which patterns are troubling? Why?
  - Which patterns are hopeful? Why?
- How long have the patterns we’re seeing now in our community existed?
- What policies, community or societal structures, and systems in your communities do you believe are creating the patterns and events you’ve been noticing?
- “What behavior patterns of key indicators characterize the current system?” (Kim, 2000b)

#### Systemic Structures

- Why have we been unable to solve X problem or achieve Y result, despite our best efforts?
- What solutions have been tried in the past, and what happened as a result? What have been the unintended consequences that we have observed?
- What has been working? What can we build on?
- How do the underlying factors contributing to the problem relate to each other?
- How do changes in one factor influence changes in others?
- What policies and practices have produced the patterns and events that we have experienced?
- “What systemic structures are producing the behavior pattern behind our current results?” (Kim, 2000b)
- What goals is the current system designed to achieve, i.e. what are the benefits of the way things are? Who reaps these benefits?
- What aspects of current reality can be leveraged to support achieving the vision?

- What resources currently exist that we can redirect toward the group's desired future?
- What is our collective picture of the system as it operates now?
  - What are the causal relationships among the parts of the system?
  - What causal relationships among key system variables are producing the vicious cycle and the outcomes we are experiencing?
  - What causal relationships are currently working as we would like?
- "What systemic structures are producing the most dominant pattern of behavior in the current system?" (Kim, 2001, p. 94)

#### Mental Models

- What beliefs and assumptions that people hold will be challenges for achieving our shared vision? Who holds them?
- What beliefs and assumptions that people hold will support achieving our shared vision?
- What beliefs and assumptions are in a phase of transition? What effects will they have on our ability to achieve our shared vision?
- In what ways are our own beliefs and assumptions influencing the patterns and events we are noticing?
- "What are the prevailing assumptions, beliefs, and values that sustain the existing systemic structures?" (Kim, 2001, p. 94)

#### Vision

- What is the current espoused vision for our area of interest?
  - If we asked people what they thought the vision related to our area of interest is, what would they say publicly?
  - What is written about vision in public relations materials for the community or organizations?
  - What are the multiple statements of vision that you are aware of?
- What is the current vision-in-use?
  - Noting current policies, practices, actions, and decisions, what do we conclude about the current vision-in-use, as distinct from what is printed or spoken?
  - Based on the results produced by the current system, what might an observer say is our current vision-in-use?

## References and Resources

- Kim, Daniel H. *Organizing for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, 2001.
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- Zurcher, Kathleen A. "A Question Guide to Accompany Hierarchy of Choices", 2017.

# The Ladder of Inference

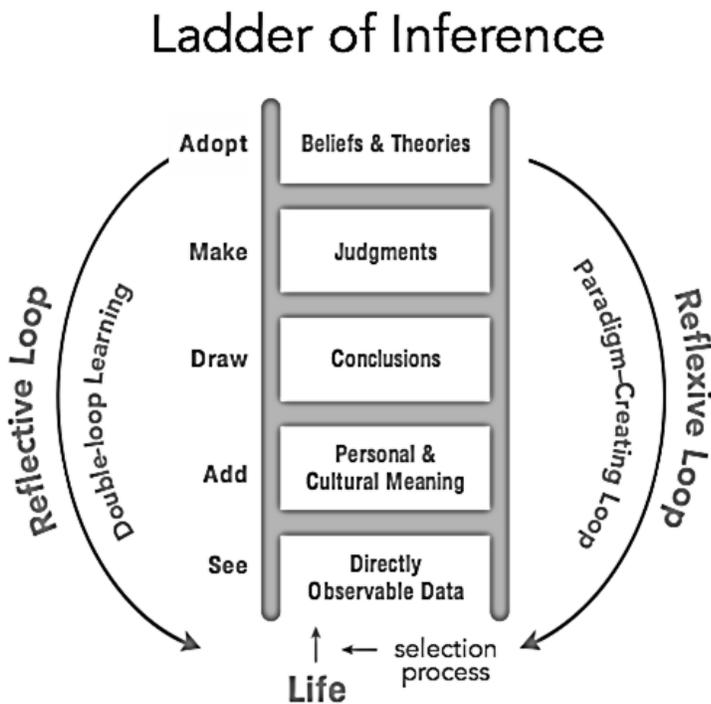
The practice guide for the Ladder of Inference used in the Food & Fitness work is currently under development by Kathleen A. Zurcher (For more information contact her at [kzurcher33@gmail.com](mailto:kzurcher33@gmail.com)). The following interim guide provides background that can be used related to the Ladder of Inference.

We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt those beliefs because they are based on conclusions, which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experience.

Our ability to achieve the results we truly desire is eroded by our feelings that:

- Our beliefs are the truth.
- The truth is obvious.
- Our beliefs are based on real data.
- The data we select are the real data.

Figure 1: The Ladder of Inference



Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory. Adapted from Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* and Senge, et al, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*

## Using the Ladder of Inference

You can't live your life without adding meaning or drawing conclusions. It would be an inefficient, tedious way to live.

But you can improve your communications through reflection, and by using the ladder of inference in three ways:

- Becoming more aware of your own thinking and reasoning (reflection);
- Making your thinking and reasoning more visible to others (advocacy);
- Inquiring into others' thinking and reasoning (inquiry).

The Ladder of Inference was first put forward by organizational psychologist Chris Argyris and used by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*.

Citation: Senge, P. M. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. Crown Business.