

The Sustainable Enterprise Learning Guide

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Instructor Materials

Chapter 2

Mental models for sustainability: Versatility of thinking

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Editors' Notes:

These materials are intended for use by academics and practitioners. In order to simplify the language, editors have determined to use the terms instructors, learners or participants rather than facilitators, professors or students.

ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Objectives

Upon completion of this activity, learners will/will be able to:

1. Describe the influence of prevailing mental models (both individually and collectively) on decision making and action taking as related to promoting more sustainable practices
2. Describe their own and their team members' usual thinking patterns
3. Describe how mental models and present degrees of versatility of thinking have affected their recent and the team's (class's) recent decisions and results
4. Develop plans for promoting both individual and team (class) versatility of thinking

Activity Length

90 minutes

Audience Description

These activities are designed for the undergraduate, or graduate/practitioner level learners.

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

Activity Name	Increasing Individual and Team (Class) Versatility of Thinking	
Preparation Checklist	One Week in Advance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute reprint copies of this article to all participants for pre-reading. Adams, J. (2006). "Building a Sustainable World: A Challenging OD Opportunity." Chapter in Jones, B. & Brazzel, M. (Eds.). <i>The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change</i>. San Francisco: Pfeiffer/John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare three (3) handouts for the meeting by making enough copies for each student. See the last four pages of this guide for the handout masters <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm venue, catering, and in-room supplies <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase of bring red or green dots (if not available, use red and green marking pens) <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a wall chart or power point slides of the objectives for the session/meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare wall chart – either 8' x 3' of butcher paper or three full-size flip chart pages taped together side-by-side. Draw the six mental models dimensions (see "Mental Models @ Work" handout page) across the wide dimension, leaving plenty of space between each dimension <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute Handout: Mental models at work©. Have these at the learners' places prior to their arrival for the session 	
Timing Flow	Step 1. Dots Activity Step 2. Discussion on perceived degrees of versatility Step 3. Discuss left/right side focuses Step 4. Discuss dialogue questions Step 5. Summary	10 minutes 25 minutes 25 minutes 25 minutes 5 minutes
Total Time	90 Minutes	
Pre-reading	Adams, J. (2006). Building a Sustainable World: A Challenging OD Opportunity, Chapter in Jones, B. & Brazzel, M. (Eds.). <i>The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change</i> . San Francisco: Pfeiffer/John Wiley & Sons, Inc.	
Pre-work	None	

ACTIVITY: VERSATILITY OF THINKING

This activity introduces thinking about the perceived versatility of thinking.

Instructor notes	Activity description
<div> <p>Slide 1</p> </div> <div> <p>Slide 2</p> </div> <p>Make sure the wall chart is ready before learners arrive so that they can begin the work as soon as the session starts.</p> <p>Step 1. Dots Activity</p>	<p>Do:</p> <p>Have slide 1 in view. Have Handout: Mental models at work© at the learners' places prior to their arrival. Review Slide 2, program objectives.</p> <p>Have the Mental Models at Work© posted and the red and green sticky dots or markers ready as participants arrive. Provide each with handout material and six green dots and six red dots (or a red and a green marker).</p> <p>Review the objectives then describe the activity. Note: The objectives include: Upon completion of this activity, participants will/will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the influence of prevailing mental models (both individually and collectively) on decision making and action taking as related to promoting more sustainable practices 2. Describe your own and your team members' usual thinking patterns 3. Describe how mental models and present degrees of versatility of thinking have affected your recent and the team's (class's) recent decisions and results 4. Develop plans for promoting both individual and team (class) versatility of thinking <p>Say:</p> <p>You will notice that I have posted the Mental Models at Work©. You will find a handout on the table with activity instructions. Before you start I want you to think about how you usually think when working with this group of people. Using the green dots (or markets) mark on each of the six dimensions posted here, a position on the continuum that you believe reflects your usual mode of thinking.</p> <p>When you have finished, use the red dots (or markers) to indicate on the continuum in the center column your impressions about how the team (group) usually thinks (Red).</p> <p>When you have finished, you will have used all your red and green dots (or made your red and green Xs) on each dimension of the wall chart.</p> <p>Also, please be prepared to talk about how much versatility (appropriate flexibility) of thinking you use and about your impression of how much your team (class) uses in its normal operations. Be prepared to give examples to support your views.</p> <p>You may begin.</p>

Do:
Give them 10 minutes to complete the activity.

Say:
When you have finished with your portion of this activity, please take a good look at the chart with everyone’s dots (marks). Now let’s sit in a circle.

Step 2. Discussion on perceived degree of versatility

NOTE: All the answers will depend on the results of the activity so no “Expected responses” are offered.

Say:
Look at the wall chart with all of the red and green dots (or X’s). Think about what conclusions do you reach about your own role? What conclusions you reach about how others view their roles (green dots/marks). Then do the same for the red dots/marks. Think about how others view the contribution to the team (group). Let’s talk about your impressions and focus on how effectively the team (class) is functioning with respect to sustainable initiatives.



Do:
Facilitate discussion.

Ask:

- What do you think about your own contributions?
- What do team members think about the contributions of others?
- If an outsider were to look at the results of this activity, what might they think about the effectiveness of this team?
- How much versatility (appropriate flexibility) of thinking do you typically exhibit? Do your teammates (classmates) agree with your assessment?
- How do the overall results help the group in its functioning? How do they hinder?
- How much versatility (appropriate flexibility) of thinking does the team (class) typically exhibit? Do your teammates (classmates) agree with your assessment?

Step 3. Discussion on left/right side focuses

**Mental Models @ Work:
Some Dimensions of a Sustainable Consciousness**

Short Term Focus on deadlines, Immediate priorities, Sense of urgency	Time Orientation	Long Term Focus on future, Potentials, Opportunities & predictions
Reactive Immediate "correction" Prevailing rules and Procedures	Focus of Responsiveness	Creative Taking initiative, New Approaches, Envisioning
Local Focus on self or immediate group, Parochial, Win/Lose	Focus of Attention	Global Whole organization, Inclusive, Ecumenical, Larger community

Slide 3

Do:
Distribute Handout 2: Left and Right Side Tables (2 pages).



Ask:

- Using the left side and right side tables, what might you do to enhance the versatility of your contributions to the team (group)? Use specific examples but stay constructive.
- What practices might the team (group) adopt to enhance the versatility of the team’s (group’s) functioning?

**Mental Models @ Work:
Some Dimensions of a Sustainable Consciousness**

Either / Or Separation, Break into parts, Specialization	Prevailing Logic	Both / And Systems, Holistic, Interrelationships
Blaming / Accountability Clear assignments, Self protection, It's not my fault, (Don't get caught)	Problem Consideration	Learning Understanding, Seek meaning, Integrity
Doing/Having Materialism, Greed, Cost effectiveness, Financial performance, Quantitative growth	Life Orientation	Being Having enough, Self-realization, "greater good," Intangibles valued, Qualitative growth

Slide 4

<p>Note: Answers will depend on the results for the initial activity so “Expected responses” are not provided here.</p>	
<p>Step 4. Discussion on dialogue questions</p> <p>Note: Answers will depend on the results for the initial activity so “Expected responses” are not provided here.</p>	 <p>Do: Distribute Handout: Questions for dialogue.</p> <p>Say: Read through the dialogue questions in the handout and mark the ones that apply to your own level of thinking versatility and those that apply to the team’s level of thinking versatility.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would someone please move us towards greater versatility by raising an appropriate question from the list on p. 4? • What actions will you each take as individuals to enhance your thinking versatility? • What actions should the team (group) take to enhance the overall thinking versatility in our operations?
<p>Step 5. Summary</p> <p>Note: Answers will depend on the results for the initial activity so “Expected responses” are not provided here.</p>	 <p>Ask: What have we done well on each of our four process goals?</p> <p>Do: Note: These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completion of pooled mental model and versatility assessments 2. Discuss exploring implications of mental model and versatility assessments 3. Individual action planning for self-questioning to establish enhanced versatility of thinking 4. Team commitments to mechanisms for applying enhanced versatility to planning and decision-making <p>Ask: What might we do differently in another meeting to fully realize these process goals?</p>

ACTIVITY MEASUREMENT

Completion of pooled mental model and versatility assessments

Discuss exploring implications of mental model and versatility assessments

Individual action planning for self-questioning to establish enhanced versatility of thinking

Team commitments to mechanisms for applying enhanced versatility to planning and decision-making

FOLLOW-UP: RESOURCES/ACTIONS

- Adams, J. (2008). Mental Models for Sustainability. Sub-Chapter in Wirtenberg, J., Russell, W.G. & Lipsky, D., Eds The Sustainable Enterprise Fieldbook,. Sheffield, UK: Greenleaf Publishing and NY: AMACOM
- Adams, J. (2006). "Building a Sustainable World: A Challenging OD Opportunity." Chapter in Jones, B. & Brazzel, M. (Eds.). *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer/John Wiley & sons, Inc.
- Adams, J. (2004). Mental Models @ Work: Implications for Teaching Sustainability. Chapter in Teaching Sustainability. Galea, C. (Ed.). Sheffield, England: Greenleaf Publishing
- Adams, J. (2003). Successful Change: Paying Attention to the Intangibles." *OD PRACTITIONER*. Winter 35(4)
- Adams, J. (2000). *Thinking today as if tomorrow mattered: The rise of a sustainable consciousness*. Earthheart Enterprises: San Francisco

HANDOUT 1: MENTAL MODELS AT WORK© ASSESSMENT

Mental Models @ Work

Some Dimensions of a Sustainable Consciousness

1. Reflect on your own thinking in terms of the six dimensions below
2. Place a green dot (or green **X**) on each dimension that you believe reflects your usual mode of thinking as a part of this team (group)
3. Now, reflect on the team (group) you work with and how it functions these days
4. Place a red dot (or red **X**) each dimension to indicate where you think the team (group) most often “operates”
- 5.

Short Term

Focus on deadlines,
Immediate priorities, Sense
of urgency

Reactive

Immediate “correction”
Prevailing rules and
Procedures

Local

Focus on self or immediate
group, Parochial, Win/Lose

Either / Or

Separation,
Break into parts,
Specialization

Blaming /

Accountability

Clear assignments, Self
protection, It’s not my fault,
(Don’t get caught)

Doing/Having

Materialism, Greed, Cost
effectiveness, Financial
performance, Quantitative
growth

Time Orientation

Focus of Responsiveness

Focus of Attention

Prevailing Logic

Problem Consideration

Life Orientation

Long Term

Focus on future,
Potentials, Opportunities
& predictions

Creative

Taking initiative,
New Approaches,
Envisioning

Global

Whole organization,
Inclusive, Ecumenical,
Larger community

Both / And

Systems,
Holistic,
Interrelationships

Learning

Understanding,
Seek meaning,
Integrity

Being

Having enough, Self-
realization, “greater
good,” Intangibles
valued, Qualitative
growth

HANDOUT 2: LEFT AND RIGHT SIDE FOCUS

Focus	Messages that Reinforce This Focus	Questions to Bring Focus Here	The Positive Value of Focusing Here	The Result of Overuse of This Focus
Short Term	Don't fix it if it ain't broke. Just do it.	What needs attention now? What are your immediate priorities?	Establishing priorities Acting with efficiency	Lose the big picture. Overlook long-term consequences. Put bandages on symptoms.
Reactive	Do as you're told. If it feels good, do it. Life's a bitch and then you die.	What is the established policy, procedure, or practice? What has been done before in this kind of situation?	Consistency Responsiveness Loyalty	Stuck in a rut Unable to flow with change
Local	Look out for "number one." You've got to expect that from a _____!	What makes you different or unique? What is special about this situation?	Survival Protection Maintaining position	Loss of perspective Ethnocentrism Loss of diversity
Separation	The best way to understand it is to take it apart. A place for everything, and everything in its place.	What are the relevant facts in this situation? What do you get when you "crunch the numbers?"	Convergence Specialization Rationality	Fragmentation Low synergy Get lost in minutiae.
Blaming	It's not my fault! All right, who's to blame here?	What are your reasons for your actions? What's wrong with this picture?	Judgment, law and rule enforcement	Win-Lose polarization Risk aversion
Doing/Having	What's in it for me? Faster, cheaper, better!	What is the most cost-effective thing to do? What's the bottom line?	Financial performance and material comforts	Attachment to possessions Loss of human sensitivity Burnout

Table 1

Working With the Left Side Focuses

Focus	Messages That Reinforce This Focus	Questions to Bring Focus Here	The Positive Value of Focusing Here	The Result of Overuse of This Focus
Long Term	Create a vision. Plan ahead.	What do you anticipate? Where are we headed? Where do we want to go?	Anticipation Prediction Possibilities Contingencies	Lose timely responsiveness Ignore pressing realities
CREATIVE	Take responsibility for yourself. You can be anything you want to be.	Is there a different or better approach? What would you do about this situation if you had a magic wand?	Innovation New ideas New directions	Overlook proven processes Reinvent the wheel
Global	Look at the big picture. Let's think about the consequences of this decision.	What's best for the organization as a whole? How can you make a difference in the world?	Comprehensive view Inclusiveness Value of diversity	Idealism Loss of initiative or drive Inattention to detail
Systems	Solving one problem almost always creates others. The whole is more than the sum of its parts"	Who are the key stakeholders? If we take this action, what consequences can we predict?	Divergent Holistic Finding key interrelationships	Equate models to reality Get lost in the clouds of complexity or theory
Learning	"Let one who is without sin cast the first stone." Here's another learning and growth opportunity.	What can you learn from this experience? How might you benefit from letting go of that grudge?	Ease of exploration Seeking growth and learning	May be taken advantage of Self-sacrificing Loss of discipline
Being	You'll never walk alone. Trust the process. As ye sow, so shall ye reap.	What really matters in your life? What does your "higher self" say about this?	Self-realization "Greater good" point of view	Become ungrounded Lose touch with "mainstream"

Table 2

Working With the Right Side Focuses

HANDOUT 3: QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

Questions for Dialogue – Select one or more or adapt to the dialogue situation

- What can I do today to further positive change? Am I currently doing the "right" things to help build a sustainable tomorrow?
- What would be better terms than "growth" and "sustainability?"
- How do we learn to shift from "us versus them" to "we're all in this together?"
- How can our organizations learn to incorporate more long-term, bigger-picture thinking?
- How do I maintain my awareness of the growing global challenges and not get so overwhelmed that I turn off and go back to business as usual?
- How do we overcome the widespread greediness and belief in scarcity?
- If the corporations in my community grow at an average annual rate of 3% (or 5%, 10%, 15%), what will be the impacts on resources, waste, community life, and the local environment?
- How can we reconcile short-term needs of having jobs that help businesses grow, when this does not appear to be sustainable in the long run?
- How can I help my organization take a more global, longer-term view?
- How can we influence our organizations to consider the questions of future impact?
- How can we bring more attention to the emerging external challenges into the everyday operations of our organizations?
- How can we better reward integrity and ethical practice at work?
- What support systems are needed for organizations of all kinds to find meaning beyond the bottom line?
- How do we get the attention of the CEOs and other key decision makers?
- How can we help business leaders connect directly with people outside of their direct business sphere -- especially children of the elderly?
- Is sustainable consciousness even possible in an organization in crisis? Is survival possible without sustainable consciousness?
- How can we link organizational incentives to activities that promote sustainable consciousness?
- How do we distinguish between "good" people and "bad" systems?
- What can I do to remember the physical environment in every decision I make?
- How can we speak for the poor if we don't know any poor people?
- Will I ever be able to feel secure in my work life again?
- What is the maximum population the earth can sustain -- for centuries and centuries -- at a decent standard of living?
- How can we make more conscious connections between global challenges and our local actions?

Table 3

Sample Questions for Building Versatility