

Empowering Reframes Exercise

What is this exercise?

A way to create inspiring reframes of limiting thinking to lead us back home; to engagement, resilience, perseverance and optimism.

Why should I use it?

The capacity to create empowering reframes is one of a leader's superpowers. Consider some well-known and lesser known reframes:

- We don't do it because it's easy but because it's hard.
- Yes, we have all failed. However, failure doesn't indicate that something is wrong. It's a sign that we are up to something.
- Successful people are not better at doing something; they are better at getting up over and over again when they have fallen down.
- Hope isn't just a feeling. Hope is that insistence inside of us that something else is possible.
- Our differences don't divide us. They are our strength.
- Not leading this project doesn't mean we aren't important anymore. We aren't done living up to our mission.
- There are many seemingly overwhelming challenges, but our challenges are what call us to be the best of who we are.
- No one group (not even Human Resources) is the guardian of merit. Merit is part of who we are as an institution and is everyone's responsibility.
- This election is not about a choice between X and Y candidates. It is about who we are as a people.

As you can see from the examples above, reframes are more than saying a way of looking at something is wrong. A good reframe provides a whole new perspective. Further, the most powerful reframes invite us to look at a topic from a higher perceptual level; from the point of view of our values, identity and purpose. For example, the reframe above about elections shifts our perception from seeing an election as a transaction where we choose person X or Y to a matter of our identity as a people. The reframe about dealing with overwhelming challenges shifts us from concerns about capacity to our shared purpose.

How does it work?

Practice reframing by following these steps:

1. Identify examples of limiting or disempowering perspectives you often hear in your workplace such as:
 - We are going around in circles and not getting anywhere on this initiative.
 - There are few job opportunities here.
 - We are not replacing those who are leaving and the work we are expected to do is staying the same.
 - Senior management isn't interested in our directorate because we aren't working on one of their top priorities.

- The boss knows what they don't want but not what they do want.
 - The staff aren't doing their research.
 - They put who they think are the best employees on the innovation project and left the rest of us to be caretakers of current operations.
2. Generate reframes of the limiting perspectives you have identified in your workplace. Test out the strength of your reframes by exploring the extent to which they shift the level of thinking to your collective values, identity or purpose.

My Leadership Identity Exercise

What is this exercise?

A way of capturing and updating a leader's identity as they undergo change and development and use this new identity as a lens through which to solve problems in new ways.

Why should I use it?

Our thinking and speaking often include metaphors. Examples abound. We speak about ballpark figures, being put out to pasture, bench strength, and an idea being hard to swallow. What we may not realize is that the metaphors we use operate like a lens that frames and guides our actions even though we may only be semi-aware of them.

For example, a few years ago the Human Resources branch (HR) of the Public Service of Canada was asked who they saw themselves to be and they said, "we see ourselves as guardians of merit." All their actions were consistent with this metaphor. As "guardians" their role was to ensure that line managers were ethical, and they spent a good deal of time developing rules and guidelines as a result.

These days, if you ask HR who they see themselves to be, they will say something more like, "We are business partners with line managers." As "business partners", they spend time getting to know the business of their manager clients and striving to add value to bottom-line results through their HR advice.

As you can see, metaphors play a critical role in framing how we see ourselves, and drive what we pay attention to and the actions we take.

Being more aware of the metaphors that are guiding your thinking and deliberately developing new ones can help you adapt more powerfully and easily to change, step out from behind limiting thinking and improve the agility with which you solve problems.

Use this exercise as your career progresses to fully embody new or more senior roles quickly by updating your leadership identity through the conscious use of a leadership metaphor.

How does it work?

Step one- Identify your current leadership metaphor

- Identify a metaphor that captures how you see yourself as a leader up to now.
- Look at your metaphor and identify what it opens up (what it makes possible) and what it closes down (what, as this metaphor, do you have less access to?).
- List up to six bullet points for each.

My metaphor opens up...	My metaphor closes down....

Step two- Identify your new leadership metaphor

- What is a new metaphor that has all of the positive elements of the previous one and none of the drawbacks?
- Test your new metaphor against each of the bullet points in your opens up/closes down lists to ensure each is a characteristic of this metaphor. The new metaphor must open up all of the same characteristics you listed for the previous metaphor. It must also have all the characteristics you captured in your closes down list which were not available before.
- If the new metaphor doesn't meet this requirement, keep brainstorming and try again.

Step three- Use your new leadership metaphor

Application #1: applying the qualities of my new leadership metaphor to solve problems

- Identify one of the challenges you are facing.
- List several key qualities and characteristics of your new metaphor.
- Take each one and map it to your challenge, looking for actions you could try.

Example

My challenge: How to build trust on my team.

My new leadership metaphor: The Eagle

Qualities and characteristics of The Eagle	Mapping this to my challenge
Symbol of strength and freedom	As a leader, I could model truth telling, and I could delegate more as a way to give people more freedom and show my

	trust.
Can fly high up and see the overview and still spot food on the ground	I need to look at the issue of trust in terms of the principles involved, and I need to understand what is playing out at the day-to-day level.
Once it spots food it quickly flies to it	When I intervene to help build trust on the team I need to be focussed. I need to take action quickly and then move on.

Template: Applying the qualities of my new leadership metaphor to solve problems

My challenge:

My new leadership metaphor:

Qualities and characteristics of _____	Mapping this to my challenge
(new metaphor)	

Application #2: using my new leadership metaphor as a mentor

When you are looking for new ideas on how to address an issue or solve a problem ask yourself:

How would a (my new leadership metaphor) approach this situation? or

If I truly was (my new leadership metaphor), what would my perspective be and what would I do?

Example

A Director was trying to change the direction of their career. They weren't finding any openings within the new professional field where they wanted to work, and they weren't well known in this domain. They were wondering if they should give up. Their new leadership metaphor was the Tender Dreamer.

In using the metaphor as a mentor, the client asked themselves: "How would a Tender Dreamer approach this impasse?" They realized that a dreamer would not address this issue as a technical one solved by having a goal, a work plan and executing that plan. A dreamer goes about making dreams come true in a more imaginative way. As a Tender Dreamer, the Director interpreted their career impasse as a call for experimentation, taking risks, enrolling others in their dream and being guided by their instincts.

One of the first things they did was gain approval to introduce a new service in their organization that was similar to the kind of work the client wanted to do. Contrary to conventional wisdom, they let their boss know they were likely to leave and offered to train their successor. Their boss was very supportive of the Director's dream and offered a number of networking leads. The Director even looked for temporary assignments which involved the work they wanted to do. After a number of short-term assignments, the Director moved full time into the field they had dreamed about, in an organization where they would never have expected to find this opportunity.