

TIPS & TOOLS SERIES

PERSPECTIVE TAKING

A BETTER WAY TO
LOOK AT THE DECISIONS
OF OTHERS AND THEIR
REASONS



empathic
CONSULTING



This is part of a Tools & Tips series developed by Empathic Consulting to support the development of empathy, understanding and aligned leadership. This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of Daniel Murray of Empathic Consulting, Sydney, 26/01/2020.

SEEING THE WORLD

While walking along the footpath, you see a round table, surrounded by four chairs. The table has a small piece of metal with the number 3 on it. There is a plate, cups and a large glass vessel with a brown liquid inside.

Based on this description of the table, do you think the shop it is in front of is a Butcher, Cafe or Chemist?

Don't worry, it is not a trick question! This is clearly a table belonging to a Cafe. But how did you know? What processes went on to decipher this scene and make such a judgement?

MENTAL MODELS

We navigate the world based on our brain's amazing ability to receive and interpret information. The brain develops and stores abstract concepts, ideas and frameworks from our experiences. It then stores these in order to make rapidly sense of future information and save reinterpretation.

We will call these stored ideas Mental Models.

For example, once you have learned what a banana is, you store this as a mental model



Then should you encounter a curved, yellow blob, you can more easily recognise this as a banana.

This is why children's books and toys don't need to be a perfect picture of a banana. Our brains don't need the detail, they are expert at making a good enough association between the input and the mental model to understand the scene.

But what about complex situations? How do brains deal with experiences they have not yet encountered?

Mental models are incredibly useful for common routines such as identifying a table and chairs, hearing our name in a noisy room, even understanding how the expressions of our parents relate to their mood. Research has shown that a baby of just four months can identify if the parent is sad or happy based on their facial expressions. However, when it comes to strangers, different people who are from outside of our usual group, our old models become incredibly unreliable.

Imagine you grow up in a quiet and conservative English household. You learn from an early age that speaking loudly is associated with anger or even aggression. It was a very rare occurrence and when someone yelled, it was a sure sign that bad things were going down. Your automatic responses became a set of mental models that helped guide you through this challenging time.

However, if you grew up in a traditional Italian household, you might have experienced that yelling was a natural part of life. People raising their voice could mean they are excited, passionate and want to share this level of emotion with others. Suddenly, your conservative mental models fail to adequately interpret the situation and are likely to cause you to have an entirely inappropriate reaction..

Understand, yelling does not mean good nor bad in isolation of interpretation and context. Our mental models fail us when we rely too heavily on them as accurate guides to the world and this is where conscious curiosity and the practice of perspective taking can provide us with tools to better understand and interpret the complex world around us.

Perspective taking, as we will see, involves suspending our own initial assumptions and exploring more broadly the situation at hand.

Specifically, we will unpack perspective taking as the ability to understand why people might make decisions that you find strange or nonsensical.



PERSPECTIVE TAKING

A PROCESS TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

Here is a simple, 7 step process to build a greater perspective. In these steps we will refer to the diagram on the following page that you can use as a template for future perspective taking exercises. We will also provide a worked example to support the explanation.

STEP 1 - THE POINT OF VIEW

First, write a brief description of the decision or action that you want to explore in the Point Of View box in the middle. This works most practically when you can consider a specific action or decision by a specific person.

EXAMPLE - THE POINT OF VIEW

John, a Financial Adviser, decides to forge his client's signature on a legal document to invest \$5,000 into a risky property fund.

STEP 2 - RATIONAL DRIVERS

In the Rational box, write down any logical reasons that the person may use to justify the decision they have made. Consider this from their perspective, not your own! Rational drivers may include tangible metrics, facts or data points.

EXAMPLE - RATIONAL DRIVERS

The property fund has seen 23% growth in the last 12 months. John receives a high commission from this investment. Forging the signature makes the process faster and everyone makes more money.

STEP 3 - EMOTIONAL DRIVERS

In the Emotional box, document any emotional reasons you might consider. Consider if fear, love, pride, hope, greed, envy, desire or a sense of justice might have played a role from their perspective.

EXAMPLE - EMOTIONAL DRIVERS

John wants his clients to be delighted with the returns. He is proud of his performance. John desires recognition and love from his peers and family. John is scared of missing his targets.

STEP 4 - STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

Looking at the broader context around them, what might be any structural influences over their decision? These may include hierarchies, processes or systems.

EXAMPLE - STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

John is one of many at his level. There have been a number of restructures where the lower sales people have lost their jobs and you need to earn to survive.

STEP 5 - POLICIES & RULES

What specific rules, policies and processes were in place that might have influenced the actions and decisions? Write these in the Policies box.

EXAMPLE - POLICIES & RULES

The business has checks and balances on all the processes. If it is wrong, he will get notified. The property fund is on the approved list so it must be safe.

STEP 6 - CULTURAL CONTEXT

In the Cultural box, write down the social and cultural influences that might have influenced the decision. What were the norms and common behaviours of the people around the decision maker?

EXAMPLE - CULTURAL CONTEXT

We have a culture of making money! The best sales people get all the accolades and sent to fancy parties in Las Vegas. The whole business is geared to making more and more money!

STEP 7 - PEOPLE DRIVERS

In the People box, consider who might be the individuals who have significant influence over this decision maker. What influence might these people close to them have?

EXAMPLE - PEOPLE DRIVERS

John's boss has been a long time friend and has been sharing that tough times are coming. He also often makes off handed jokes that we all "do what it takes" to hit our numbers.

Now that we have completed the Perspective Chart, reflect on each box and then reconsider the Point Of View statement in the middle of the page. You may still disagree with the action or decision, but hopefully through this process you will have developed a broader appreciation for the possible reasons behind the decision.

From here, we recommend two courses of action:

1. Check the Perspective

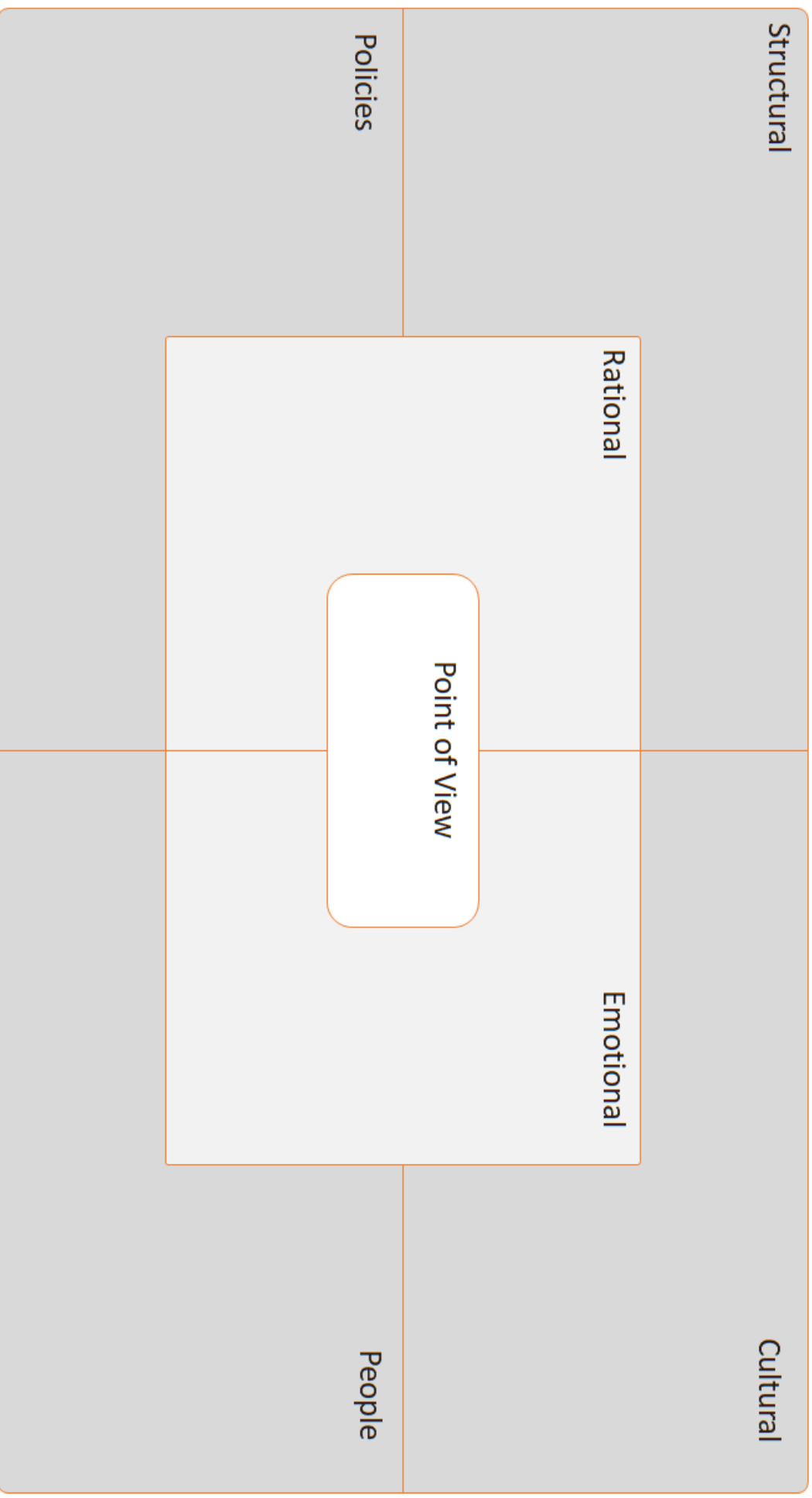
Ideally, you can use this chart to develop a list of questions you might be able to ask the specific person, or others who have more information on the decision maker to build a more accurate picture of the various perspectives. This chart serves as your initial 'best guess'. Confirming this provides even deeper clarity.

2. Influencing for Change

Based on your new understanding and validated perspective, consider what levers may be most effective to influence change for future decisions. For example, in our case of John the Adviser, setting new policies might not be enough. We may need to consider the structural changes in the business, the team culture and the way in which we recognise and reward behaviour of top performers to safeguard against these risks.

PERSPECTIVE TAKING

A PROCESS TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE



LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Hear from our happy clients...

"Thought inspiring, provoking and interesting. Took you through the emotional journey of using empathy in your business"
Robbie Cooke, CEO, Tyro Payments

"Fantastic both in content and delivery. I was looking for someone to open up other ways of approaching leadership and looking at our business environment and they delivered!- Michaela Flanagan, Head of Branch Operations, Swiss Re

"I can honestly say it was one of the best sessions I have been a part of. The content was unique & very interactive. I highly recommend Empathic Consulting to build empathy & understanding to drive performance." - Daniel Markovski, Group Sales Manager, Nova

"They engaged people who I didn't think would ever respond, let alone take away actions. Post this session, I observed genuine behaviour changes. This was one of the best things I have done for the team." - Rochelle Eldridge, Executive Manager, CBA



For more information on how Empathic Consulting can support with specific programs and the key steps to implementation, contact:

Daniel & Miranda Murray

daniel@empathicconsulting.com

+61 418 920 412

miranda@empathicconsulting.com

+61 439 905 901

