

RESONANCE

A LEADER'S GUIDE TO THE THINKING IN THE ROOM

PARLER *pour* PARLER

DORIS PROUDLOVE

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00 / BEFORE WE BEGIN



THE WAY WE THINK TOGETHER MATTERS

We have a growing body of knowledge about the many ways human beings generate ideas, process information, navigate uncertainty, interpret situations, solve problems, and make decisions.



And yet, in most workplaces, we still spend remarkably little time understanding how the people around us actually think.

For much of working history, some of that understanding developed naturally.

People spent years alongside one another. They shared offices, travelled together, worked through difficult projects, and watched one another respond under pressure.

Over time, they came to know who needed to talk something through, who became quiet while thinking, who saw possibilities first, who spotted the problem nobody had named, who moved quickly, and who needed more time before contributing.

Much of that knowledge was never formally articulated.

People simply came to know one another.

THE WORKPLACE HAS EVOLVED

The structure of work has evolved, and it continues to evolve. Organizations are increasingly project-based. People move between initiatives, transformation programs, cross-functional teams, launches, integrations, and temporary groups assembled around a particular outcome.

A team may work intensely together for six months or a year and then disperse into entirely different configurations.
Expertise is increasingly specialized and distributed across functions, organizations, geographies, and time zones.



Remote and hybrid work have added another layer. People can collaborate closely without ever occupying the same physical room.

AI is accelerating the pace again.

We can produce, analyze, communicate, iterate, and decide faster than ever. But faster work does not necessarily create deeper understanding of the people doing it.

There was once more time for familiarity to develop almost accidentally. You learned who challenged the first answer. Who everyone quietly listened to. Who saw the flaw. Who calmed the room. Who needed a day before giving you their best response.

Increasingly, teams have less time to know one another while being asked to solve more complex problems together.

That creates an interesting tension.

We have become extraordinarily sophisticated at connecting work while still being surprisingly unsophisticated at understanding the minds doing it.

WHY I CREATED THIS GUIDE



For more than two decades, I worked as a consultant.

That matters because consulting rarely gives you years to understand a team.

A mandate may last six months, a year, perhaps two. You enter an organization with work to accomplish, relationships already established, histories you were not part of, and expectations for results.

To be effective, I had to learn quickly.

Who influences the room.
Who needs context before moving.
Who sees the obstacle first.
Who creates momentum.
Who has ideas but rarely introduces them unless invited.
Who needs time before responding.
Who can translate between different people.
Who appears resistant but may actually be seeing something others have missed.
And, importantly, what happens to all of those individuals when they come together.

Over time, that sharpened something I had already been doing intuitively: reading rooms.

Not by reducing people to types, but by noticing patterns.

How someone approaches a problem.
Where their attention naturally goes.
What happens to their thinking under pressure.
Who expands a conversation or narrows it.
Which voices gain influence.
Which voices disappear.
How the same person may contribute very differently depending on trust, hierarchy, stakes, and context.

For years, much of this was instinctive.

What became increasingly interesting to me was discovering a body of research and language that gave names and distinctions to many of the patterns I had been observing.

It helped explain why two intelligent, capable people can look at exactly the same situation and process it very differently.

My perspective has also been shaped by work across corporate and entrepreneurial environments, leadership teams, workshops, retreats, and both on-site and remote teams, along with training in coaching and facilitation, including Robbins-Madanes Strategic Intervention and professional coaching certifications.

I am not a psychologist, neuroscientist, or academic researcher.

This guide brings together established knowledge, decades of practical observation, and a long-standing fascination with a deceptively simple question:

What happens when different minds enter the same room and are asked to make something happen together?

RESONANCE looks deliberately at one part of that question: cognition. How someone behaves or contributes in a room cannot be explained by cognitive difference alone. Personality, learned social behaviour, relationships, experience, power and the context itself also matter. Those wider dynamics are the territory of Better Rooms. Here, the narrower task is to become more precise at noticing different forms of thinking without turning them into explanations of the whole person.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doris Proudlove has spent more than two decades working inside teams, organizations, transformations, and complex projects, often as a consultant entering environments where she had to understand people quickly.

Her work now focuses on what happens when people think, decide, adapt and work together — particularly the conditions that allow more of the intelligence already present in a room to become available.

NONE OF US HAS ONLY ONE COGNITIVE STYLE



Human thinking is more fluid than most labels allow.
None of us has only one cognitive style.

A person may be highly divergent while developing an idea and strongly convergent when delivering it.

Someone may tolerate enormous ambiguity in an area they understand deeply and seek much greater certainty outside their expertise.

A person who responds rapidly in conversation may become highly reflective when the consequences of a decision matter.

Context matters.
And cognition is only one influence on what we observe.

Experience, confidence, trust, power, the nature of the problem, and the composition of the room can all influence how someone thinks and contributes.

People also do not think in isolation.

They respond to who is speaking.
Who holds authority.
What has already been said.
How much disagreement feels permissible.
Whether their contribution has previously been valued.

So the purpose of understanding cognitive difference is not to decide:
“This is what kind of thinker you are.”

The more useful questions are:
“How does this person tend to think in this context?”
“What is happening to that thinking inside this team?”
“What kind of thinking does this situation need?”

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE WORK

Understanding how people think does more than make work easier.

It can make the work richer.
More nuanced.
More considered.
More original.
More human.

When you consider that what looks like resistance may be exploration, you may manage a conversation differently.

When you consider whether someone may need time to process rather than simply lacking confidence, you may structure a decision differently.

When you recognize who generates possibilities, who tests assumptions, who sees risk, who integrates competing perspectives, and who helps bring the room toward a decision, you can begin drawing intentionally on those differences rather than waiting for them to collide.

The value of cognitive difference is not simply that people think differently.
The value lies in what becomes possible between those differences.

Between the person who expands the field and the person who narrows it.
Between the person who sees opportunity and the person who sees risk.
Between the person who moves instinctively and the person who reflects.
Between the person who holds complexity and the person who creates clarity.

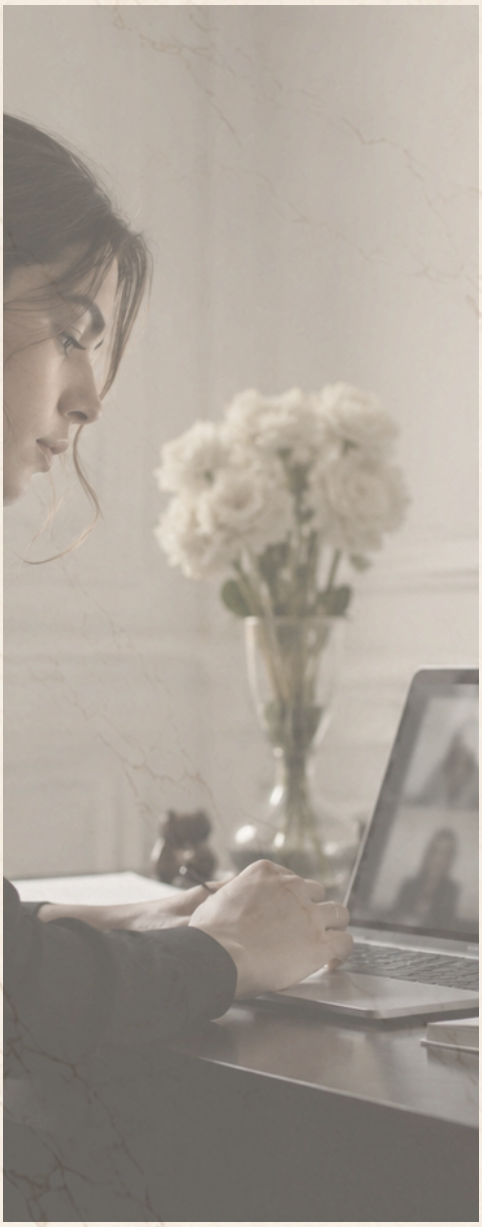
The brilliance is not always located in one exceptional thinker.
Often, it emerges between people.

That is where cognitive difference can become collective intelligence.



There is also a deeply human return.
People want to feel understood.

They want what they contribute to be seen accurately.
Someone whose questions are repeatedly interpreted as resistance may eventually stop asking them.
Someone whose reflection is treated as slowness may begin withholding it.
Someone whose associative thinking is repeatedly dismissed as tangential may stop offering the connection nobody else had seen.



When people feel understood and accurately valued, more of their intelligence becomes available to the work.
When they do not, the very differences that could enrich the room can become friction.

Exploration may be read as indecision.
Reflection may be read as hesitation.
Challenge may be read as negativity.
Caution may be read as resistance.

Poor decisions.
Unnecessary conflict.
Premature consensus.
Missed risks.
Missed possibilities.
Teams solving the wrong problem very efficiently.

The goal is not harmony for its own sake.

It is to distinguish productive difference from unnecessary friction and create the conditions in which more of the intelligence already present can reach the work.

At its best, that creates something much more interesting: a team whose intelligence is greater than the sum of its individual minds.

FROM NOTICING DIFFERENCE TO LEVERAGING IT

The concepts that follow come from different areas of psychology, cognition, creativity research, decision-making, and group behaviour.

They include styles, tendencies, capacities, information-processing patterns, biases, and group-level effects. They do not form one formal taxonomy, and they are not an assessment.

Think of them instead as a vocabulary for seeing what may already be happening inside your team with greater precision.



Because things that look similar on the surface can be very different underneath.

Exploration can look like indecision.
Reflection can look like hesitation.
A desire for closure can look like confidence.
Associative thinking can look like distraction.
Tolerance for ambiguity can look like lack of urgency.
Problem finding can look like negativity.
Cognitive diversity can look like disagreement.

Understanding the distinction gives a leader more choices.

Give someone more time.
Ask another question.
Invite the perspective that has not surfaced.
Delay closure.
Challenge consensus.

Consider whether the person creating friction may also be introducing exactly the complexity the room needs.

The objective is not simply to notice difference.

It is to understand it well enough that it can become useful.
To help people feel heard without requiring agreement.
To help individuals recognize the value of what they bring and the value of thinking unlike their own.
And to create rooms in which more of the intelligence already present can actually contribute.

The most useful question is therefore not:
“What kind of thinker is this person?”

It is:
“What are they seeing that I may not be seeing?”
“What conditions allow them to contribute their best thinking?”
“How does their way of thinking interact with the rest of the room?”
And ultimately:
“What kind of thinking does this moment need, and whose thinking are we not yet hearing?”





01 / COGNITIVE STYLES



COGNITIVE STYLES AT A GLANCE

The concepts in this guide are not all “cognitive styles” in the strict academic sense. They include styles, tendencies, capacities, information-processing patterns, biases, and group-level effects, brought together because each offers a useful lens on how people think and contribute.

The purpose is not to label people, but to recognize patterns with greater precision and understand what different kinds of thinking may bring to the room.

- Ideational Fluency
- Originality
- Divergent Thinking
- Elaboration
- Convergent Thinking
- Problem Finding
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Need for Cognition
- Associative Fluency
- Tolerance for Ambiguity

COGNITIVE STYLES AT A GLANCE / CONTINUED

Need for Closure

Cognitive Reflection

Working Memory

Metacognition

Perspective Taking

Integrative Complexity

Cognitive Diversity

Functional Fixedness

Mental Set

Groupthink

Information-Processing Style

HOW TO READ EACH COGNITIVE STYLE



A cognitive tendency is not valuable in every situation in the same way. The same way of thinking that can be exceptionally useful in one context can become frustrated, underused, or misread in another.

For each concept, consider not only what it looks like, but where it is most useful and what kinds of conditions may prevent that thinking from contributing at its best.

The goal is not to place people into fixed roles.

It is to understand when a particular kind of thinking may be especially valuable to the work, and when the environment may be working against it.





02 / GENERATING POSSIBILITIES



Nothing meaningful gets built without someone first being able to see what does not yet exist.

Every new idea, product, direction, solution, or possibility begins with people who can move beyond what is already known and imagine what else could be true.

Some people do this by generating many options. Some by making unexpected connections. Some by seeing the problem before anyone else has named it. Some by taking an initial spark and developing it into something more complete.

These are different forms of possibility-generating thinking.

Knowing who your possibility generators are is powerful because they often expand the field before the rest of the team begins narrowing it.

They help a team see more than the obvious answer.
And without that kind of thinking in the room, teams can become very efficient at improving what already exists while missing what could exist instead.



✦ IDEATIONAL FLUENCY

DEFINITION

The ability to generate many ideas, possibilities, or responses with ease.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who keeps producing options rather than settling quickly on the first workable answer. They often help a team widen the field and see more possible directions before choosing one.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable at the beginning of a problem, during brainstorming, innovation, strategic exploration, product development, or whenever a team needs more possibilities before narrowing its focus.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Highly constrained environments where the answer has effectively already been decided, where exploration is treated as wasted time, or where every new idea is immediately pushed toward execution before there has been enough room to think.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Lack of focus, indecision, or an inability to settle on one direction.

DIVERGENT THINKING

DEFINITION

The ability to move outward from a problem and explore multiple possible solutions, interpretations, or directions.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who resists closing the field too early and keeps asking what else might be possible. They often help a team avoid settling prematurely on the first acceptable answer.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable when a problem is ambiguous, when the obvious solutions are not working, when innovation is needed, or when a team needs to challenge assumptions and consider genuinely different paths forward.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Highly directive environments where the decision has effectively already been made, where speed is valued over exploration, or where questioning the initial frame is interpreted as slowing the work down.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Overcomplicating the problem, being indecisive, or making it harder than it needs to be.

⌘ ASSOCIATIVE FLUENCY

DEFINITION

The ease with which someone connects ideas, concepts, experiences, or patterns that initially seem unrelated.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who makes unexpected connections, uses analogy naturally, or sees relevance between things others experience as separate. They can often bring a fresh angle to a familiar problem by linking it to something outside the obvious frame.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in innovation, concept development, storytelling, strategy, problem-solving, branding, synthesis, and any situation where the team needs to connect disparate information or see a problem from a less conventional angle.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Highly linear environments where every contribution is expected to follow an obvious sequence, where tangents are quickly shut down, or where ideas are judged before the connection has had time to become clear.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Going off on tangents, being unfocused, or making irrelevant connections.

◇ ORIGINALITY

DEFINITION

The capacity to produce ideas, interpretations, or approaches that are comparatively unusual or unexpected.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who moves beyond the obvious response and introduces possibilities the room had not considered. They often challenge habitual thinking simply by seeing the problem from a less conventional angle.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable when a team needs innovation, differentiation, fresh strategy, new concepts, or a way out of repetitive thinking. Original thinkers can be particularly useful when familiar solutions are producing familiar results.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where conformity is rewarded, where unusual ideas are dismissed before being explored, or where there is little tolerance for approaches that do not immediately resemble what has worked before.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Being unconventional for the sake of it, impractical, or unnecessarily disruptive.

⊕ ELABORATION

DEFINITION

The ability to develop an initial idea with greater detail, structure, complexity, and specificity.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who takes a promising idea and begins building it out. They add substance, identify what is missing, connect the pieces, and help turn something conceptual into something more coherent and usable.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable when an idea needs to become a plan, concept, proposal, process, product, or experience. Elaborative thinkers are useful when the team needs depth, completeness, and enough detail to move from a rough idea toward something that can actually be executed.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments that reward only speed and brevity, where detail is dismissed too quickly as unnecessary, or where ideas are constantly introduced but rarely developed far enough to become meaningful.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Adding unnecessary detail, overcomplicating things, or taking too long to get to the point.

4 PROBLEM FINDING

DEFINITION

The ability to notice a problem, tension, opportunity, or worthwhile question before it has been formally defined.

AT WORK

This may look like someone sensing that something deserves attention before the rest of the room agrees there is anything to solve. They often notice gaps, contradictions, emerging risks, or opportunities that have not yet been named.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable at the beginning of strategy, innovation, transformation, product development, and complex problem-solving, where identifying the right problem is often more important than solving the first one presented.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where questioning the premise is discouraged, where the problem has already been narrowly defined, or where raising an issue before there is obvious evidence is treated as negativity or obstruction.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Looking for problems, being overly critical, or making an issue out of something that does not yet seem important.



03 / NARROWING & DECIDING



Possibility on its own is not enough.

Ideas need people who can distill them, test them, narrow the field, and help a team decide what deserves to move forward.

Without that kind of thinking, even a highly creative room can remain suspended in options. The conversation may be stimulating, but nothing quite lands. Possibilities multiply faster than choices are made, and momentum begins to disappear.

The cognitive styles in this section help turn breadth into direction. They help teams decide what matters most, what is workable, what should be questioned further, and when enough thinking has happened to make a choice.

Importantly, narrowing is not the same as shutting thinking down. The strongest decision-makers can focus the room while still leaving enough space to question the conclusion, test assumptions, and reconsider when something does not hold.

Knowing how a room moves from possibility toward decision is essential.

Ideas create potential.
Decisions create movement.
Possibility on its own is not enough.



CONVERGENT THINKING

DEFINITION

The ability to narrow multiple possibilities toward the strongest, most relevant, or most workable answer.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who naturally begins sorting, comparing, eliminating, and prioritizing options. They help a team move from an open field of possibilities toward a direction that can actually be acted on.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable once enough possibilities have been generated and the team needs focus, prioritization, decision-making, or a clear path forward. Convergent thinkers are particularly useful when the work risks becoming stuck in endless options without commitment.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where the conversation remains permanently open, where decisions are repeatedly revisited, or where new possibilities continue to be introduced after the team needs to move. They may also become frustrated when there are no criteria for choosing between options.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Closing the conversation too quickly, being rigid, or lacking imagination.

NEED FOR CLOSURE

DEFINITION

The desire to reach a definite answer, reduce uncertainty, and bring an open question or decision to resolution.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who naturally pushes a conversation toward a conclusion, wants clarity on what has been decided, and prefers to leave the room knowing what happens next.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable when a team has explored enough, when ambiguity is beginning to stall progress, or when a decision is needed in order to create momentum, accountability, and action.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where decisions remain perpetually open, conversations are repeatedly revisited, or uncertainty continues without a clear reason. It can also be frustrating when the team keeps generating possibilities after a workable direction has already emerged.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Decisiveness, confidence, or certainty about the quality of the answer.

↶ COGNITIVE REFLECTION

DEFINITION

The tendency to question an immediate intuitive answer and consider whether another interpretation or conclusion may be more accurate.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who pauses before accepting the obvious answer, revisits assumptions, and asks whether the first conclusion actually holds. They can help a team avoid acting too quickly on instinct, habit, or apparent consensus.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable when decisions carry meaningful consequences, when the obvious answer feels too easy, when assumptions need testing, or when a team would benefit from slowing down long enough to distinguish instinct from judgment.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where speed is consistently valued over reflection, where questioning a conclusion is treated as lack of confidence, or where decisions are expected before there has been enough time to think them through properly.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Second-guessing, hesitation, overthinking, or a lack of decisiveness.

⋙ PROCESSING SPEED

DEFINITION

The speed at which someone can perceive, process, and respond to relatively straightforward information.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who responds quickly, absorbs straightforward information rapidly, and can keep pace with fast-moving conversations or decisions. They can help create momentum when the team needs to process information and act without unnecessary delay.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in time-sensitive situations, fast-moving discussions, operational environments, and moments where the team needs to absorb information quickly and keep things moving.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where every decision is slowed by excessive discussion, where straightforward issues are repeatedly revisited, or where the pace feels unnecessarily deliberate. It can also be frustrating when quick responses are automatically treated as superficial rather than considered.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Intelligence, decisiveness, or superior judgment. Faster thinking is not necessarily deeper or better thinking.



04 / ADAPTING



No plan survives contact with reality exactly as imagined.

Conditions change. Information arrives late. Assumptions prove incomplete. Priorities shift. People leave. Constraints tighten. Something that looked straightforward at the beginning becomes more complicated once the work is underway.

This is where another kind of thinking becomes essential.

Teams need people who can adjust without losing direction. People who can rethink an approach when it no longer fits, hold complexity without becoming paralyzed by it, work with incomplete information, and keep moving even when the path is imperfect.

The cognitive styles in this section help a team respond to what actually happens rather than remaining attached to what was supposed to happen.
They help the room absorb change, revise its assumptions, integrate new information, and continue steering toward the outcome.

Because execution is rarely a straight line.

Progress depends not only on having a direction, but on being able to adapt the course along the way.



⇄ COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

DEFINITION

The ability to shift perspective, strategy, or mental framework when circumstances change.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who can recognize when an approach is no longer working, reconsider an assumption, or move into a different way of thinking without remaining overly attached to the original plan.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable during change, uncertainty, transformation, problem-solving, and any situation where new information requires the team to rethink its approach. Flexible thinkers can help a team adapt without losing momentum.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where the plan is treated as fixed, where changing direction is seen as inconsistency, or where people are expected to continue with an approach even after the conditions that justified it have changed.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Inconsistency, lack of conviction, or changing one's mind too easily.

~ TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY

DEFINITION

The capacity to remain curious, functional, and engaged when information is incomplete, contradictory, or uncertain.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who can stay with an unresolved question without rushing to make the uncertainty disappear. They are often able to keep thinking productively while the picture is still forming.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in innovation, strategy, transformation, complex problem-solving, and early-stage work where the answer is not yet clear. These thinkers can help a team remain open long enough for a better understanding or stronger direction to emerge.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments that demand premature certainty, where every unknown must immediately be converted into a firm answer, or where uncertainty is treated as a failure of planning rather than a normal part of complex work.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Indecision, lack of urgency, or being too comfortable without a clear answer.

⧉ WORKING MEMORY

DEFINITION

The capacity to hold and mentally work with several pieces of information at once.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who can keep track of competing constraints, arguments, consequences, dependencies, or perspectives while a discussion is still unfolding. They are often able to connect information across different parts of a problem without losing the thread.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in complex planning, strategy, troubleshooting, negotiations, systems thinking, and situations where several variables need to be considered simultaneously before a sound decision can be made.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where information is fragmented unnecessarily, where context is repeatedly lost, or where people are expected to make decisions from isolated pieces without access to the larger picture. It can also be frustrating when complex interdependencies are oversimplified too quickly.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Simply having a good memory, or for making a problem more complicated than it needs to be.

◎ METACOGNITION

DEFINITION

Awareness of one's own thinking, including assumptions, biases, uncertainty, habits, and gaps in knowledge.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who can step back from their own conclusion and examine how they arrived there. They are often able to notice when emotion, habit, confidence, or prior experience may be shaping their judgment.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in complex decision-making, leadership, conflict, reflection, learning, and situations where the team needs to examine not only what it thinks, but how it is thinking. Metacognitive thinkers can help surface hidden assumptions before they become embedded in the work.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where self-questioning is treated as weakness, where certainty is rewarded more than reflection, or where there is little appetite for examining the assumptions behind a decision.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Overthinking, excessive self-analysis, indecision, or lack of confidence.

INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

DEFINITION

The ability to recognize multiple legitimate dimensions, perspectives, or competing truths within a situation and integrate them into a more nuanced understanding.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who resists reducing a complex issue to a simple either/or choice. They can often hold competing priorities, understand why different positions make sense, and work toward a conclusion that reflects more than one reality at once.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in strategy, leadership, negotiation, conflict, transformation, and situations where the team is dealing with competing interests, trade-offs, or truths that cannot be resolved by choosing one side and dismissing the other.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments that demand overly simple answers to complex questions, where nuance is treated as weakness, or where people are pressured to choose a side before the competing realities have been properly understood.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Overcomplicating the issue, avoiding a clear position, or making something more difficult than it needs to be.

∞ NEED FOR COGNITION

DEFINITION

The tendency to enjoy effortful thinking, complexity, analysis, and intellectually demanding questions.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who naturally wants to examine an issue more deeply, understand how the pieces fit together, and explore the reasoning behind a conclusion rather than accepting a convenient or surface-level answer.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in strategy, research, analysis, complex problem-solving, design, planning, and situations where the team benefits from sustained intellectual effort and deeper examination before acting.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where speed is consistently valued over depth, where questions are shut down too quickly, or where thoughtful analysis is treated as unnecessary once a superficially workable answer has been found.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Overthinking, intellectualizing everything, making things more complicated than necessary, or being unwilling to move on.



05 / OPPOSING & INTEGRATING



Work does not happen between abstract thinking styles.

It happens between people.

And once different ways of thinking begin interacting, the challenge is no longer only how each individual processes a problem. It becomes how those individuals understand one another, interpret one another, and continue working together when their instincts, pace, assumptions, and perspectives are different.

This is where cognitive difference becomes interpersonal.

A team needs people who can take perspective, recognize that another person may be working from a different frame, and understand that the same information can be perceived and processed in very different ways.

These capacities matter because difference can easily be misread.

A colleague who appears difficult may be seeing a constraint you have not noticed.



Someone who seems disengaged may be processing internally.

Another may sound overly certain while organizing information very differently from the rest of the room.

The cognitive styles in this section help people work across those differences rather than simply react to them.

They help a team understand not only:
“How do I think?”
but also:

“How are you thinking, and what do I need to understand in order for us to work well together?”
Because strong teams do not require people to think alike.

They require people to become better at working with minds unlike their own.

◐ PERSPECTIVE TAKING

DEFINITION

The ability to mentally represent another person's viewpoint, incentives, knowledge, assumptions, or interpretation of a situation.

AT WORK

This may look like someone who can understand why another person sees the same issue differently without needing to agree with them. They often help a team interpret behaviour more accurately and bridge differences in priorities, experience, or point of view.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in leadership, collaboration, negotiation, conflict, stakeholder management, change, and any situation where understanding another person's position is necessary to move the work forward.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where positions harden quickly, where disagreement is treated as disloyalty, or where people are expected to defend their own point of view without making any effort to understand how others arrived at theirs.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Agreement, taking someone else's side, being overly accommodating, or lacking conviction.

◫ INFORMATION-PROCESSING STYLE

DEFINITION

A broad term for differences in how people tend to take in, organize, interpret, and work with information, such as intuitive or analytical, global or detailed, rapid or deliberative.

AT WORK

This may look like two people receiving the same information and moving through it in very different ways. One may start with the big picture, another with the details. One may rely first on pattern recognition, another on step-by-step analysis.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially useful to recognize when teams are dealing with complex information, cross-functional work, decision-making, planning, or communication that benefits from more than one way of processing the same material.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where one processing style is treated as the correct one, where people are expected to think at the same pace or in the same sequence, or where differences in how information is handled are interpreted as differences in intelligence or competence.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

One person thinking more correctly than another, lack of understanding, slowness, overanalysis, or being too intuitive.

⊙ FUNCTIONAL FIXEDNESS

DEFINITION

The tendency to see an object, process, role, or idea primarily through its familiar or established use.

AT WORK

This may look like someone assuming that a process, tool, structure, or role must continue to be used in the way it always has been. Familiarity can make alternative uses or approaches harder to see.

MOST IMPORTANT TO NOTICE WHEN

Functional fixedness is not usually something to use as a strength in the same way as the other styles. Its value is in recognizing when familiarity, expertise, or past success may be narrowing the field too much and when the team needs to deliberately challenge the usual frame.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments that require reinvention, innovation, or adaptation, especially when the familiar approach is no longer working but still feels like the obvious or only legitimate one.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Experience, practicality, consistency, or simply knowing how things are done.

⟳ MENTAL SET / EINSTELLUNG EFFECT

DEFINITION

The tendency to keep using a familiar solution, strategy, or way of thinking because it worked previously, even when a different approach may now be better.

AT WORK

This may look like someone reaching quickly for a proven method, established process, or past solution because it has delivered results before. Experience can make a familiar answer feel self-evidently correct, even when the context has shifted.

MOST IMPORTANT TO NOTICE WHEN

Like functional fixedness, this is less a style to leverage than a pattern to recognize. Familiar approaches can create speed and efficiency when the conditions are genuinely similar, but leaders need to notice when past success is becoming a constraint on present thinking.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments that require reinvention, adaptation, or a fundamentally different response, especially when the team keeps applying yesterday's solution to today's problem.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Experience, expertise, confidence, or simply knowing what works.



06 / COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE



Something changes when individual minds begin thinking together.



A team gradually develops more than a collection of individual perspectives. Shared assumptions form. Certain ideas gain momentum. Ways of interpreting problems become familiar. The group begins to develop its own patterns of thought.

That collective intelligence can be extraordinarily powerful.

It allows people to build on one another's ideas, combine different perspectives, develop shared understanding, and accomplish things no individual thinker could produce alone.

But collective thinking can also become self-reinforcing.
An idea that was once useful can become unquestioned.
A shared assumption can begin to feel like fact.

Agreement can become easier than dissent.

The team's way of seeing can gradually become the only way of seeing. The cognitive dynamics in this section matter because strong collective intelligence depends on preserving the individual minds that create it.

Leaders need to understand how people enter the collective, who naturally aligns, who questions, who introduces difference, and whose perspective may disappear once the room begins moving toward a shared view.

The goal is not to prevent a collective mind from forming.
Teams need shared understanding to move together.
The goal is to keep that collective intelligence alive, permeable, and capable of evolving.

Because the strongest teams can create a shared way forward without losing the individual thinking that keeps that way forward fresh.

Collective intelligence is desirable. Collective conformity is not.

✧ COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

DEFINITION

Differences within a group in how people perceive information, reason, approach problems, generate ideas, interpret situations, and arrive at decisions.

AT WORK

This may look like a team whose members do not naturally approach the same problem in the same way. One person expands possibilities, another tests assumptions, another sees risk, another integrates competing perspectives, and another brings the room toward a decision.

BEST USED WHEN

Especially valuable in complex work, innovation, strategy, transformation, problem-solving, and situations where no single perspective is likely to be sufficient. Cognitive diversity gives a team access to a wider range of questions, interpretations, and possible responses.

MOST FRUSTRATING WHEN

Environments where difference is treated as lack of alignment, where one dominant way of thinking becomes the unwritten standard, or where speed and harmony are valued more highly than making room for competing perspectives.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Disagreement, lack of cohesion, inefficiency, or a team that is not aligned.

≠ GROUPTHINK

DEFINITION

A group-level tendency in which the desire for agreement, cohesion, or social harmony begins to suppress dissent, critical examination, and alternative possibilities.

AT WORK

This may look like a room that appears highly aligned while doubts, objections, and competing interpretations remain unspoken. People may begin adjusting their thinking to fit the emerging consensus rather than testing whether the consensus is actually sound.

MOST LIKELY WHEN

Groupthink is not something to leverage. Its value is in recognizing the conditions that make it more likely: strong pressure for agreement, dominant voices, high-status leaders signaling a preferred answer, time pressure, or teams that value cohesion more than challenge.

MOST DAMAGING WHEN

For independent or dissenting thinkers, groupthink can be especially frustrating in environments where disagreement carries a social cost, where questioning the prevailing view is interpreted as disloyalty, or where consensus forms before alternatives have been properly explored.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Alignment, cohesion, decisiveness, team confidence, or a strong shared culture.



07 / DIFFERENCE IS NOT THE PROBLEM



The value is not in deciding which way of thinking is better.



One person opens the field.

Another helps narrow it.

One can stay with uncertainty.

Another knows when the room needs a decision.

One sees connections.

Another sees what does not hold.

One thinks out loud.

Another needs time before giving you their best thinking.

One adapts quickly when the plan changes.

Another protects the question the room may be moving past too quickly.

The value is in understanding what each way of thinking can contribute, when it is needed, and how those differences can work together.

Because difference, when a room is able to use it, can contribute to collective intelligence.

When the room cannot make use of it, that same difference can contribute to friction, silence, conformity or wasted potential.

The leadership questions are:
What kind of thinking does this moment need?
Whose thinking could make this room better, and are we creating the conditions to hear it?

And most importantly, who are we not hearing?



08 / QUESTIONS FOR YOUR ROOM



Information that never changes what happens in the room has limited value.

The purpose of RESONANCE is not simply to give you new language. It is to help you see what may be happening more clearly, make better judgments about the conditions around the work, and create conditions in which more of people's thinking can actually contribute.

When something in the room feels off, pause before explaining it.

Ask yourself:

Could what looks like indecision be continued exploration?

Could what looks like resistance be someone seeing a risk the rest of us have moved past?

Could apparent agreement mean the room has stopped generating alternatives?

Could what looks like overthinking be someone holding complexity we have simplified too quickly?

Could apparent slowness mean someone needs more time to produce their best thinking?

Could what looks like distraction be someone making a connection the rest of us have not yet seen?

Could apparent confidence partly reflect a stronger need for closure?

Could some of this friction be cognitive difference doing useful work?

THE LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

Then ask:

What kind of thinking does this moment need?

Who may be able to bring that kind of thinking?

Whose contribution is being misunderstood?

Who have we not heard from yet?

The goal is not to make everyone think alike.

It is to recognize what is happening, draw out what is valuable, and help different kinds of thinking become useful to the work.



09 / EXPERIENCE THE THINKING IN THE ROOM



PARLER POUR PARLER

Parler pour parler is where many of these ideas become experiential.

It is a series of private, facilitated experiences designed for small teams.

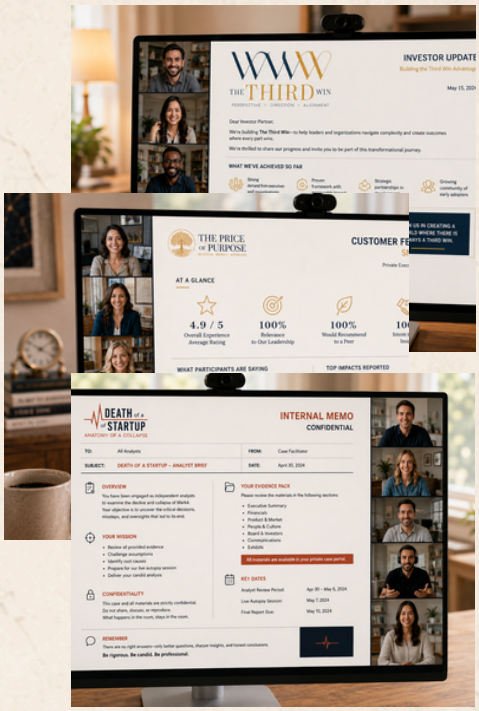
They are not assessments.
They are not personality exercises.

And they are not conventional workshops in which people are taught a framework and then asked to practise it.

Instead, the team is given a situation with enough substance, ambiguity, and consequence to require real judgment together.

A dilemma.
Competing interests.
Incomplete information.
Different interpretations.
Values with consequences.
A decision without a perfectly clean answer.

Participants have to think.



They interpret.
Question.
Negotiate.
Challenge.
Weigh competing priorities.
Change position or hold it.
Influence one another.
Make judgments.
Make choices.

Because the attention is on the situation rather than on analysing one another, people are less occupied with performing a type or giving the 'right' answer.

The dynamics of the room begin to surface through the work itself. Across the experiences, the group repeatedly encounters the same underlying demands:

generate possibilities → narrow and decide → adapt → oppose and integrate → think together.

Participants are not taught this as a framework. They experience it through the situation itself.

THE EXPERIENCES

THE THIRD WIN
PERSPECTIVE DIRECTION ALIGNMENT

The Third Win places people inside competing interests and asks what becomes possible beyond a simple win-or-lose frame.

Death of a Startup places them inside competing interpretations, asking them to examine evidence, judgment, responsibility, and the story they construct from the same information.

DEATH of a STARTUP
ANATOMY OF A COLLAPSE

THE PRICE OF PURPOSE
MISSION • MONEY • MEANING

The Price of Purpose places competing values under pressure, asking what happens when purpose, money, responsibility, and conviction no longer align neatly.

Different experience.
Different tension.
Different thinking brought forward.

The underlying journey remains the same; what changes is the pressure placed on the room.

What emerges is not a diagnosis of who someone is.
It is a glimpse of how this particular group thinks together when something meaningful is at stake.
Because sometimes the most powerful way to understand a room is not to talk about teamwork.

It is to give the room something worth thinking about.
To explore the Parler pour parler experiences, **CLICK HERE.**

RESONANCE gives leaders a language for noticing cognitive difference and collective intelligence.

Parler pour parler creates spaces where some of those dynamics can be experienced rather than merely discussed.

BETTER ROOMS

RESONANCE explores one particular lens: cognition — the different ways people may generate ideas, process information, interpret situations, navigate uncertainty, challenge assumptions and arrive at decisions.

But cognition is only one thing a person brings into a room.

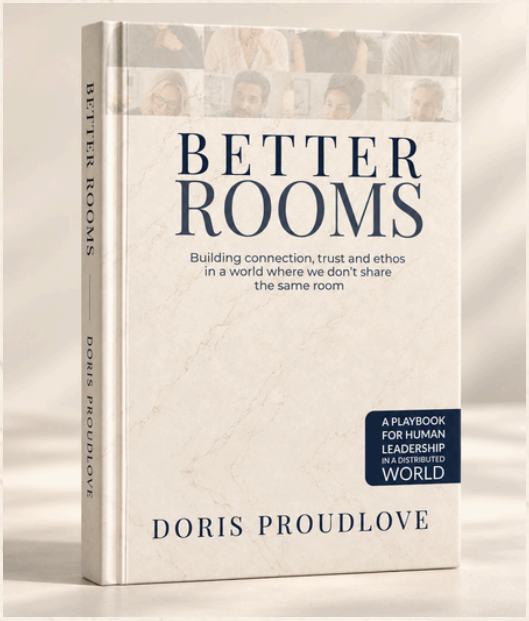
People also bring personality: relatively enduring tendencies in how they behave and relate.

They bring learned social behaviour: what experience has taught them is safe, rewarded, expected or effective.

And then they enter a particular context.

A room.

In Better Rooms, “room” means more than a physical or virtual space. It is the complete set of conditions acting on the people inside it — hierarchy, relationships, history, expectations, incentives, power, norms, perceived safety, purpose, time pressure and the other people present.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT BETTER ROOMS, CLICK HERE

The working model is simple:

PERSON = cognition + personality + learned social behaviour

ROOM = context

WHAT HAPPENS = person × room × other people

Not as a psychological equation, but as a way of remembering that behaviour rarely belongs to one variable alone.

That leads to one of the central disciplines of Better Rooms:
We can observe what happened without pretending we know exactly why it happened.

Someone asks repeatedly for approval before proceeding.
Is that cognitive discomfort with ambiguity?
Personality?
Something learned from a previous manager?
A response to the hierarchy in this particular room?
Some interaction among them?

We may not know.

What we can observe is what happened.
And that changes the question.
Instead of asking:

“What kind of person is this?”



Better Rooms asks:

“What is happening in this room that means this person is behaving this way here?”

The same person may be quiet in one room and extraordinarily vocal in another.
The same thinking may become useful in one context and disappear in another.

Cognitive difference therefore belongs inside a larger story.

RESONANCE helps us notice some of the thinking entering the room.
Better Rooms asks what happens when whole people enter a particular context and begin affecting one another.

And underneath it all is a larger question:
What is happening in this room that determines what becomes possible between the people inside it?

To learn more about Better Rooms, CLICK HERE



DORIS PROUDLOVE

Doris Proudlove has spent more than two decades working inside teams, organizations, transformations, and complex projects, often as a consultant entering rooms where she had to understand people quickly.

Her work has been shaped by a long-standing fascination with what happens when people think, decide, adapt, disagree and try to create something together.

Rather than reducing those dynamics to individual types, her work looks at the interaction between the people entering a room and the conditions acting upon them.

That interest sits at the centre of Better Rooms and Parler pour parler, a series of private facilitated experiences designed to let teams experience some of those dynamics through meaningful shared situations.

Her focus is creating rooms in which more of the intelligence, humanity and difference already present can actually contribute.

Cover photograph:

Maya Alexa G. Romero / [unsplash.com/photos/birds-flying-over-a-calm-body-of-water]

AI & Editorial Note:

AI-assisted tools were used selectively in the development of certain visual elements and for editorial refinement. All concepts, frameworks, interpretations, and final editorial decisions are the work of Doris Proudlove.



10 / SOURCES & FOUNDATIONS



This guide brings together concepts from several areas of psychology, creativity research, decision-making, cognition, and group dynamics. The concepts included here do not come from a single formal taxonomy of cognitive styles. Some describe cognitive styles or tendencies, some describe capacities or information-processing patterns, and others describe biases or group-level effects.

They are brought together here for a practical reason: each offers a useful lens for understanding how people think, contribute, interpret, decide, and work together in teams.

The definitions in this guide are written in accessible language for a leadership context and are informed by the foundational and contemporary sources below.

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A FINAL NOTE

I hope RESONANCE gave you something useful to notice, question, or bring back into your own room.

Like any work made by a human being, there may be something I've missed, a detail I could have expressed more clearly, or even the occasional error. If you spot one, or simply want to tell me what stayed with you, I'd genuinely love to hear from you.

hello@dorisproudlove.com

And if we're already connected, feel free to simply send me a message.
Doris