

ADAPTIVE THINKING

ADAPTIVE LABS

ADAPTIVE THINKING PAPERS

PAPER NO. 001

Why Better Thinking Matters More Than Better Decisions

THE FOUNDATION OF ADAPTIVE THINKING

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RESEARCH. REFLECTION. EVOLUTION.

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Before searching for a better decision, have I spent enough time improving the way I think about this situation?

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Executive Summary

Better thinking precedes better decisions.

For most of my professional life, I believed I was becoming better at making decisions. Looking back, I now believe the greatest improvement was not in the quality of my decisions, but in the quality of my thinking before those decisions were made.

Modern organizations are not suffering from a lack of information. They are overwhelmed by it. Information alone does not create understanding. Understanding is created by the way we interpret reality.

Adaptive Thinking grew from a simple question: How do I know that I truly understand the situation before making any decision at all?

The quality of a decision can rarely exceed the quality of the thinking that precedes it.

This paper introduces the foundation of Adaptive Thinking: a conscious practice of slowing down, understanding reality, broadening perspective, challenging assumptions, exploring possibilities, choosing and acting deliberately, and reflecting in a way that changes the next starting point.

02

Introduction

For most of my professional life, I believed I was becoming better at making decisions.

Like many leaders, I invested countless hours learning new frameworks, improving analytical skills, studying business strategy and understanding financial models. Every successful project seemed to reinforce the same belief: better decisions produce better outcomes.

Looking back, I now believe I was focusing on the wrong objective.

The greatest improvement was not in the quality of my decisions. It was in the quality of my thinking before those decisions were made.

That realization did not arrive as a single breakthrough. It emerged gradually, through projects, difficult conversations, mistakes, successes and situations in which the obvious answer proved incomplete.

Over time, I began to notice that the most important work often happened before the decision itself: in the way the situation was framed, the questions that were asked and the assumptions that remained invisible.

That realization became the foundation of what I now call Adaptive Thinking.

03

The Problem

Organizations do not fail because of a lack of information.

Today we have more data, more tools, more reports and more predictive models than at any time in history. Yet the quality of decisions is not improving at the same pace.

The real problem is not information. It is the way we think with it.

In complex situations, people naturally search for clarity. The first plausible explanation quickly becomes the accepted explanation. From that moment, analysis often turns into confirmation rather than exploration.

We simplify complexity before we understand it. We interpret new facts through previous experience. We defend conclusions that feel coherent, even when reality is still incomplete.

How confident are we that we truly understand the situation?

The danger is not that people lack intelligence. The danger is that intelligent people can become convinced too early that they already understand.

04

The Shift

Adaptive Thinking was discovered, not designed.

Adaptive Thinking did not begin as an ambition to create a new methodology. It emerged through experience.

I noticed that the most difficult decisions were rarely improved by adding one more spreadsheet, one more report or one more meeting. They improved when the way we approached the situation changed.

The shift was subtle but fundamental: from searching immediately for the right answer to becoming more deliberate about how the problem was understood.

Instead of treating uncertainty as something to eliminate quickly, I began treating it as information. Instead of seeing different perspectives as obstacles to alignment, I began seeing them as part of the reality that needed to be understood.

What emerged was not a formula. It was a pattern: stop, understand, broaden, challenge, explore, choose, act and reflect.

The change was not primarily in the decisions. It was in the thinking that made those decisions possible.



A Different Question

Before asking what we should do, we need to understand what we are actually solving.

Most decision-making processes begin with a familiar question: What should we do?

It is a necessary question, but it is often asked too early.

Adaptive Thinking begins somewhere else: Are we solving the right problem?

That question creates space. It separates the situation from our first interpretation of it. It allows us to distinguish facts from assumptions, urgency from importance, symptoms from causes and confidence from understanding.

A better question does not delay action. It improves the quality of the action that follows.

This is not an argument for endless analysis. It is an argument for conscious analysis: enough to understand what matters, what remains uncertain and what we may be overlooking.

The first responsibility is not to produce an answer. It is to understand the question.

06

What Is Adaptive Thinking?

Searching for a way to describe this approach, I explored many existing methodologies. I learned from each of them. Yet none described the entire journey I had observed in practice.

The more I organized years of observations, the more clearly a pattern emerged. It did not feel like inventing a model. It felt like discovering one.

Not a formula. A pattern.

Human thinking is contextual. We interpret reality through experience, emotion, incentives, relationships, time pressure and incomplete information. Adaptive Thinking does not remove this complexity. It embraces it.

Adaptive Thinking can be described as a structured approach to understanding reality before deciding how to respond to it.

It makes thinking more conscious.

It does not tell us what to think. It helps us understand how we think.

It does not replace experience. It makes experience more deliberate.

It does not eliminate intuition. It creates conditions in which intuition becomes more reliable.

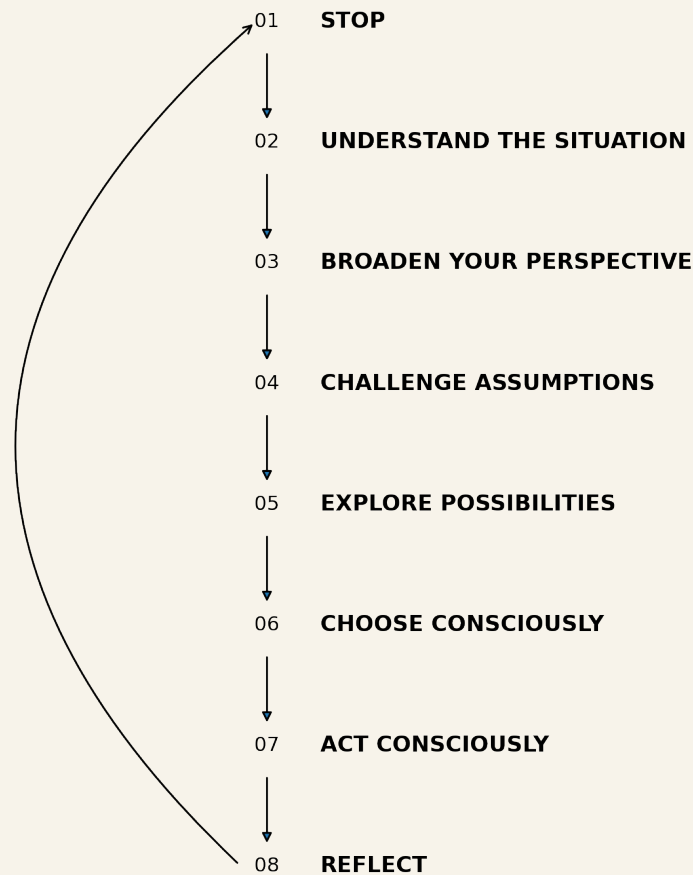
Adaptive Thinking is not a destination. It is a practice.

The framework exists to make thinking visible, not to prescribe one correct way of thinking.

07

The Adaptive Thinking Framework

Every meaningful journey begins with awareness, not action.



Reflection changes the next starting point.

Reflection does not complete the journey. It changes the starting point of the next one.

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Why a Spiral, Not a Circle

Many models describe learning as a cycle.

Observe. Plan. Act. Review. Repeat.

There is nothing wrong with that perspective. Cycles are useful because they remind us that learning never truly ends.

Yet over time I found myself questioning one simple assumption.

Do we really return to the same starting point?

I do not believe we do.

Every meaningful experience changes us.

Sometimes the change is obvious. More often it is almost invisible.

A conversation. A difficult decision. A mistake. A success that teaches humility rather than confidence. A question that stays with us long after the meeting has ended.

Each of these experiences quietly reshapes the way we see the world.

Why a Spiral, Not a Circle — continued

The next time we face a similar situation, we are not beginning again. We are beginning differently.

The facts may appear similar. The environment may look familiar. But the person interpreting that reality is no longer exactly the same.

Experience has changed perspective. Perspective has changed understanding. Understanding changes every decision that follows.

That is why I prefer to think of Adaptive Thinking as a spiral rather than a circle.

A circle suggests repetition. A spiral represents growth.

Not growth measured by titles, achievements or expertise. Growth measured by awareness.

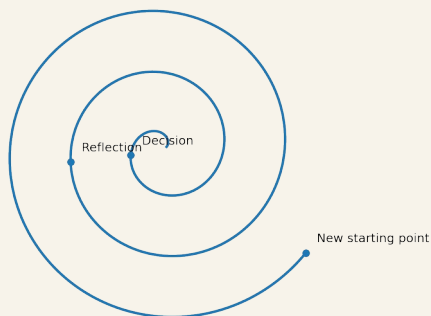
Every reflection becomes the foundation of the next beginning.

The purpose of reflection is not to judge whether a decision was successful or unsuccessful. Its purpose is to understand what reality has taught us.

Sometimes we confirm that our assumptions were correct. Sometimes we discover they were incomplete. Both outcomes move us forward.

Because the value of experience does not come from always being right. It comes from becoming more conscious.

Perhaps that is the real purpose of Adaptive Thinking: not to eliminate uncertainty, but to ensure that every encounter with uncertainty leaves us better prepared for the next one.



09

The Journey Ahead

If you have reached this point, you may be expecting the next pages to explain each stage of Adaptive Thinking in detail.

That was my original intention as well.

The more I reflected on it, however, the more I realized that doing so would contradict the very philosophy behind the framework.

Adaptive Thinking is not a technique to be memorized. It is a way of thinking to be experienced.

No single paper could adequately explain how our understanding of reality evolves, how assumptions influence perception, how perspective changes decisions or how reflection gradually reshapes future judgment.

Each of those subjects deserves its own conversation.

For that reason, this paper is intentionally incomplete. Not because something is missing, but because every meaningful journey begins with understanding the foundations before exploring the details.

The pages you have just read are therefore not a manual. They are an invitation.

An invitation to slow down before rushing towards conclusions. To become more curious than certain. To replace immediate answers with better questions. To see reflection not as the end of a process, but as the beginning of another.

In the papers that follow, we will explore each element of Adaptive Thinking individually. Not to create more complexity, but to make complexity easier to understand.

Because meaningful change rarely begins when we discover a better answer. It begins when we start asking better questions.

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Reflection

Before searching for a better decision...

**When was the last time you deliberately improved
the way you think?**

*The space below is intentionally left blank.
Use it for your own reflection.*

About the Author

Tomasz Mazurkiewicz is a finance executive and transformation leader with more than twenty years of experience across Europe in financial services, automotive and mobility.

His work combines finance, strategy, operating-model design and practical transformation. Adaptive Thinking grew from that experience and from a continuing interest in how people and organizations understand complex reality before they act.

Adaptive Thinking is not about having all the answers. It is about asking better questions and thinking better before we act.

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