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The Five Minds of a Manager

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Jonathan Gosling, Henry Mintzberg

The Idea in Brief

Does your management job seem impossible? If so, that's not surprising. Your many roles are so often contradictory. Be global, and be local, you're told. Collaborate, and compete. Change perpetually, and maintain order. Make the numbers while nurturing your people. How can you possibly reconcile all this? No one can.

But you can triumph over managerial obstacles, despite conflicting expectations, if you focus less on what you should do and more on how you should think. Successful managers *think* their way through their jobs, using five different **mind-sets** that allow them to deal adeptly with the world around them:

- A **reflective mind-set** allows you to be thoughtful, to see familiar experiences in a new light, setting the stage for insights and innovative products and services.
- An **analytical mind-set** ensures that you make decisions based on in-depth data--both quantitative and qualitative.
- A **worldly mind-set** provides you with cultural and social insights essential to operating in diverse regions, serving varied customer segments.
- A **collaborative mind-set** enables you to orchestrate relationships among individuals and teams producing your products and services.
- An **action mind-set** energizes you to create and expedite the best plans for achieving your strategic goals.

The key to your managerial effectiveness? Regularly access all five mind-sets, not in any particular order, but by cycling through each as needed. And don't go it alone. When you collaborate with colleagues by interweaving your collective mind-sets, you--and your organization--will excel.

The Idea in Practice

Managing effectively encompasses five basic tasks, each with its own mind-set:

Managing Yourself Relies on a Reflective Mind-Set

Without reflection, management is mindless. Events make sense only when you stop and think about what they mean, how they connect, what patterns they reveal. Reflection puts events into new and clear perspective. As you look in, you can better see out, perceiving familiar things in unfamiliar

ways--a product as a service, a customer as a partner. As you look back--at what worked and what did not--you see ahead to what your organization should become.

Managing Your Organization Requires an *Analytical Mind-Set*

You analyze most effectively when you go beyond the superficial--just running the numbers. Instead, you drill into richer sources of data, including your and others' underlying values and biases. What data and assumptions are *they* using? Breaking up complex phenomena into component parts helps you see problems in new ways, moving your organization toward action and change.

Managing Your Context Depends on a *Worldly Mind-Set*

When you see the world through the eyes of other cultures, other industries, other companies, you better understand the diverse contexts in which your organization operates. That requires getting out of the office and spending time where products are produced, customers served, environments threatened. Shell Oil exemplifies a worldly mind-set. It extracts oil and brings its products to markets without violating local rights or disrupting local environments.

Managing Relationships Requires a *Collaborative Mind-Set*

You manage most effectively when you manage not individuals but the relationships among them. You're creating the conditions--the structures and attitudes--that encourage teamwork. You're managing from *inside*, throughout your organization--not from the top. You're not running the show--unless absolutely necessary.

Managing Change Calls for an *Action Mind-Set*

Managers have a bias for action. Your challenge, then, is to mobilize your and others' energies around what needs to change--while sustaining what must stay the same. An action mind-set is not about "whipping the horses into a frenzy." Instead, survey the situation, determine your teams' capabilities and your organization's needs, and help everyone move in the right direction.

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Article

[The Work of Leadership](#)

Harvard Business Review

January-February 1997

by Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie

Though this article never refers explicitly to "mind-sets," it offers a resonant approach to managing the complexities of leadership. When organizational problems arise, leaders respond best by asking tough questions rather than providing easy answers. The authors advise leaders to *get on the balcony* (think "reflective mind-set") for the high-level perspective necessary to *identify the adaptive challenge* that everyone in the organization must face. Leaders who guide their organizations successfully through adaptive work know how to *regulate distress* (not unlike the action mind-set's assessment of the rate of change a team can handle), and *maintain disciplined attention* by modeling collaboration and encouraging managers to face conflicts head on. Adaptive leaders who *give work back to employees* by encouraging--and supporting--risk-taking demonstrate that the answers to organizational problems lie squarely within them. Finally, the most effective leaders *protect leadership voices from below* by encouraging rather than punishing whistle-blowers and creative deviants.

About the Authors

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