Irrational Thinking

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Common Patterns of Faulty Thinking or "Irrational Beliefs"

- **Jumping to Conclusions:** Settling on a belief when there is little or no evidence to support it.

- **Magnifying and Minimizing:** Over-focusing on the negative while ignoring the positive

- **All-or-Nothing:** Exaggerated "black and white" thinking. Perfectionism.

- **Overgeneralization:** Maintaining global beliefs based on one factor or a single situation.

- **Personalization:** The tendency to automatically blame yourself.

- **Externalization:** The tendency to automatically blame others.

- **Mind-Reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking, or expecting others to know what you are thinking.

- **Catastrophizing:** Worst-case-scenario thinking. Exaggerating the impact of a negative event.

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Self-Talk Associated With Faulty Thinking

- Should

- Ought

- Must

- Have to

- Need

- Always / Never

- Perfect

- Someone *made* me feel that way

- It's horrible, terrible, catastrophic

- It's unfair

- I deserve _____.

- Making assumptions: about the future, what others think, what others will do.

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Examples

- **Jumping to Conclusions:** "If I don't do well on this project, my leaders will think I'm incompetent."

- **Magnifying and Minimizing:** "I didn't know the answer to a question today. I suck and my supervisor will rate me poorly."

- **All-or-Nothing:** "If I don't get selected for the open position, my career is over. "

- **Overgeneralization:** "Everyone else has gotten promoted but me."

- **Personalization:** "I wasn't selected for the open position. My supervisor must have it out for me."

- **Externalization:** "I wasn't selected for the project. The project leader is threatened by my skills."

- **Mind-Reading:** "My supervisor hasn't responded to my email. She must be upset about what I said."

- **Catastrophizing:** Worst case scenario thinking. Exaggerating the impact of a negative event.

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Check Your Thinking – Internal Factors

1. Recognize the emotion.

2. How do you feel? Emotionally? Physically?

3. Are their external factors that need to be resolved? If so, how?

4. What are you telling yourself about your behavior?

5. Are the messages you are sending yourself (your thoughts) true? Is there any evidence? Are they grounded in workplace policy or expectations?

6. How can you adjust your thinking about your behavior? (see ABC exercise)

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Check Your Thinking – Internal Factors

- **Jumping to Conclusions**

  – Slow down and ask yourself, "What evidence do I have for my conclusion?"

- **Tunnel Vision**

  – Ask yourself, "What more important or relevant information did I miss?"

- **Overgeneralization**

  – Be open-minded. Ask yourself, "Is there a reason that might explain the behavior?"

- **Magnifying & Minimizing**

  – Be evenhanded. Ask yourself, "Am I looking at the worst possible outcome? What are the alternatives. Am I looking at only the negative? What positive events occurred?"

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Check Your Thinking – Internal Factors

- **Personalizing**

  – Look outward. Ask yourself, "How did others or circumstances contribute to the problem or issue?"

- **Externalizing**

  – Look inward. Ask yourself, "How did I contribute to the problem or issue?"

- **Mind-Reading**

  – Ask yourself, "Do I have proof that person thinks that way, or am I making assumptions?" Check to see what the other person was really thinking. Ask, "Did you mean…?" or "Can I clarify what you meant?" Also, "What do you expect of me?"

- **Catastrophizing**

  – Put it in perspective. What's the worst that can realistically happen?

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Check Your Thinking – Case Example

From	To
Jumping to Conclusions: "If I don't deliver this project early, my boss will think I'm incompetent."	*"We set a clear deadline. I have discussed the project with my boss and s/he supports the project timeline."*
Tunnel Vision: "If my leaders don't see me arrive early, they will not recognize my dedication."	*"I will stay in regular communication with my supervisor so s/he knows my schedule and sees my output. And they know that I am productive member of the team."*
All-or-Nothing: "If I don't get an "exceeds expectation" rating, it will be unfair, inaccurate and my career is in jeopardy."	*"My worth as an employee is more than one rating. I have a long history of adding value and my work is consistently good. I will have ongoing career planning discussions with my supervisor."*
Overgeneralization: "If I don't get a promotion every 2-3 years, there is little career potential for me at Caterpillar."	*"Career opportunities are often unpredictable. Advancement can take time. I will focus on doing good work and demonstrating my value. That will pay off."*
Magnifying and Minimizing: "Even though I'm delivering my goals, the only thing that matters is if my leaders like me."	*"Relationships are always important, but they are only part of the equations. I will build collaborative relationships and demonstrate myself as someone people want to work with."*

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Check Your Thinking – Case Example

From	To
Personalization: "Everyone else is being promoted but me. It is unfair and shows favoritism."	*"Is <u>everyone</u> really getting promoted? Some are. And my time will come. I will discuss this with my supervisor to see how I can be better positioned for my next job."*
Externalization: "If my co-workers would just step up and do their share, we would get this project done on time."	*"Part of working on a project team is group accountability and motivating everyone. I will seek ways to support those falling behind."*
Mind-Reading: "Everyone judges me and is threatened because my background and skills are superior."	*"While I may be a stronger member of the team, I don't really know what people think. Maybe I can ask? If their behavior seems out of line, I will discuss it with my supervisor."*
Catastrophizing: "If my team fails to deliver, my rating is going to be horrible."	*"I am partially responsible for the team deliverables. But if there are things out of my control impacting the team, I will discuss it with my supervisor."*

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