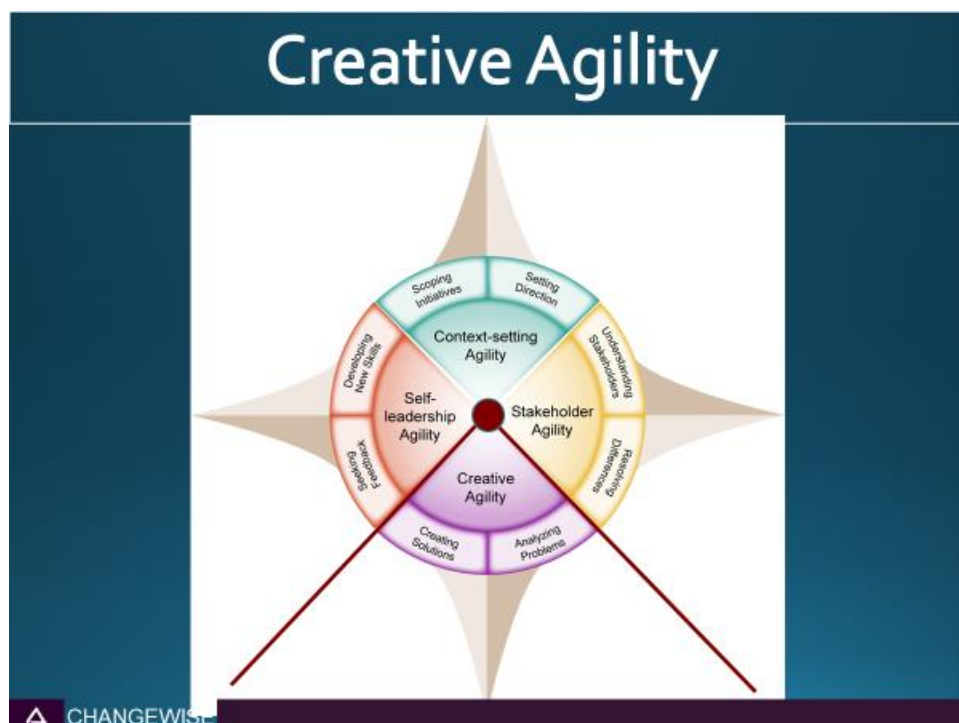# Creative Agility

Title slide:

Hi everyone. Bill Joiner with a mini-webinar about Creative Agility, what it is is and what's involved as a leader develops from Expert to Achiever and then to Catalyst in their Creative Agility.

In a number of ways, the elements of Creative Agility parallel those of Context-Setting Agility, but as applied to very specific problems and opportunities. Here are some of the similarities:

- Like all the other types of agility, Creative Agility is a reflective action process, with an awareness aspect and an intentionality aspect. The awareness aspect is about understanding problems and opportunities. The intentionality aspect is about solving specific problems.

- The problem diagnosis dimension of Creative Agility is very much like the part of Context-Setting Agility where you clarify the need for change. The problem solution dimension, especially the identification of criteria for judging a good solution, parallels "direction setting" in Context-Setting Agility, where, for example, you clarify desired outcomes.

- And as a leader moves from Expert to Achiever in both Creative and Context-Setting Agility, you employ what I call the "first level of systems thinking," which takes into account things like organizational structure, roles, and business processes. As you move from Achiever to Catalyst Creative Agility, you also employ the "second level of systems thinking," which takes into account things like organizational and team culture, and dynamics within and between groups.

What makes these two types of agility significantly different is that Context-Setting Agility deals with the big picture, while Creative Agility is applied to specific problems and plans. For example, to create a business strategy, you need Context-Setting Agility. To solve a problem encountered in implementing the strategy, you need Creative Agility.

I would also like to add here that the focus of the group session on Creative Agility and this mini-webinar will be on facilitating Creative Agility in one-on-one coaching conversations. There are many methods out there now that can be used to great effect in facilitating creative problem-solving in a group setting. But these methods will not be the focus here.

It's also worth noting that, especially beyond the Expert level, Creative Agility also involves some degree of Stakeholder Agility. In other words, both problem definitions and problem solutions can often benefit from the input of stakeholders. However, in this mini-webinar and the upcoming group session on Creative Agility, we are going to isolate our pure Creative Agility coaching "muscle," knowing that we can put it together with our Stakeholder Agility coaching muscle when we use the Leadership Agility model in specific coaching situations.

Before I go further, I'd like to say something about the kinds of problems for which higher levels of Creative Agility are needed. In addition to lots of qualitative and quantitative data that were considered in developing the Creative Agility part of the model, one of the biggest contributions conceptually came from a book published back in 1994 called *Developing Reflective Judgment*. In the book, the authors, Patricia King and Karen Kitchener, present a stage development model that builds on the earlier work of William Perry at Harvard, who was another source for the framework.

I wouldn't recommend reading their book unless you want to get deep in the academic weeds. But a few highlights may be helpful.

Ill-Structured Problems

	"Well-structured"	"Ill-structured"
Problem can be described with a high degree of completeness	• Yes	• No
Problem can be solved with a high degree of certainty	• Yes	• No
Experts usually agree on the correct solution	• Yes	• Usually not

First, reflective judgment is a thought process that's useful in approaching what have been called "ill-structured" problems, as contrasted with "well-structured" problems. Here, well-structured does not mean someone has done a great job of setting up the problem. Instead, it means that the nature of the problem makes it something that's relatively easy to solve. For example, it's pretty easy to describe the problem in complete way, without needing to think about a range of additional variables. Second, a well-structured problem is one that has a solution about which most experts would agree. Once you identify the solution, you can have a high degree of confidence it's the right solution.

I'll-structured problems are ones where you don't have all the information you'd need to describe the problem in a complete and systematic way. You can't rely on experts to give you the definitive solution, because they may very well disagree about the best solution. Once you come up with a solution, you can't be certain that it's the best one.

As the business environment becomes increasingly complex and changes more rapidly, the problems it generates, increasingly, are ill-structured.

The developmental model of reflective judgment was also helpful in identifying the internal capacities that make Creative Agility possible, something I'll come back to a bit later in this mini-webinar.

To facilitate Creative Agility in one-on-one coaching setting, there are a couple of basic abilities that it helps for the coach to have. First is the ability to recognize when a coaching conversation enters the territory of Creative Agility, and, second, to be able to track when the conversation is about what the **problem** is, and when it is about possible **solution** ideas.

For one thing, if you have an Expert-level client who may want to fly into talking about solutions, without much exploration of what the problem is, this allows you to detect that this is what's happening, so you can bring them back to clarifying the problem.

What if the issue as more of an opportunity than a problem? The process for figuring out how to best act on an opportunity is much the same as for solving something regarded as a problem. The "problem" in this case is how to get from where things are now to a state where the opportunity is being realized.
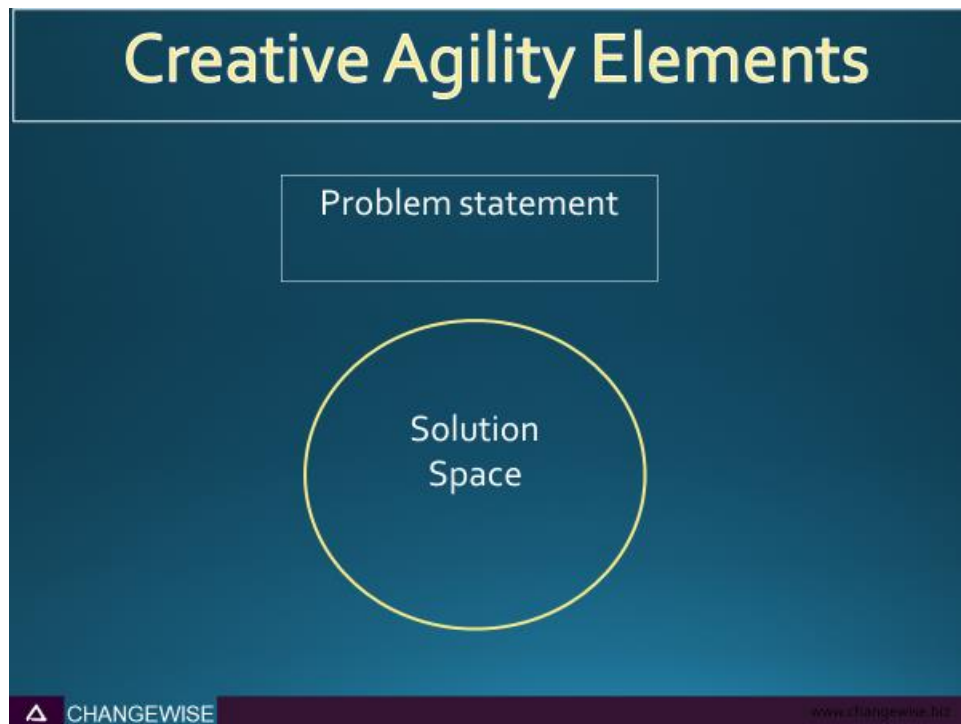
This graphic, which captures the two elements just mentioned, is the beginning of a diagram we use in some of our leadership workshops to give people a chance to practice Creative Agility. We start by asking them to write a brief "problem statement," just a few sentences.
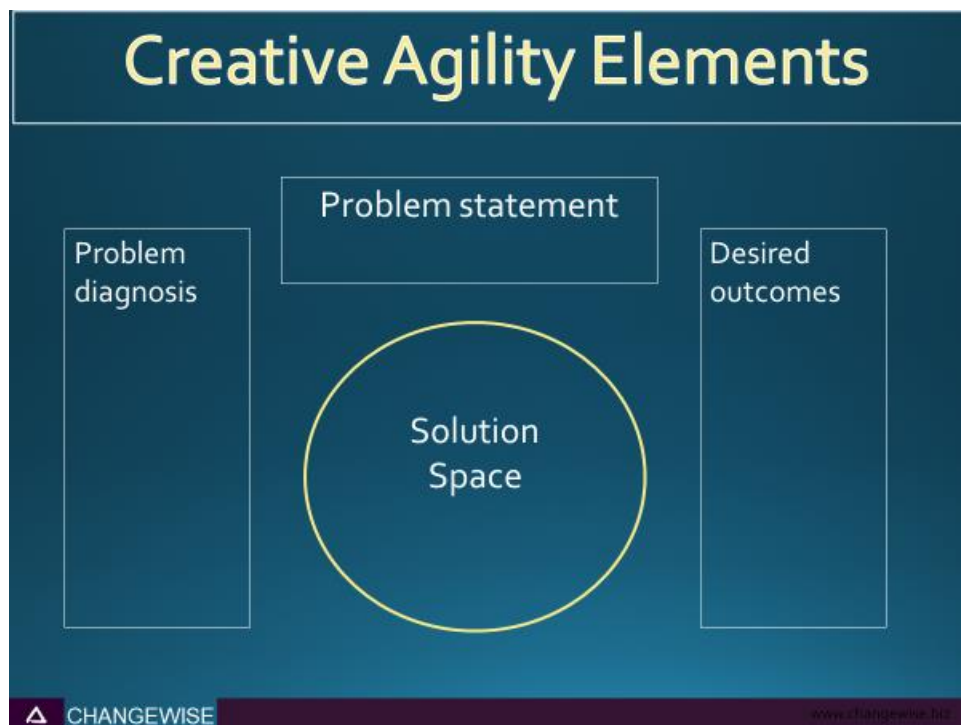
Then we add two additional elements. The first is problem diagnosis. This is an opportunity to examine the problem in more detail, identify what's causing it, and, in some cases, even shift the overall problem-statement itself.
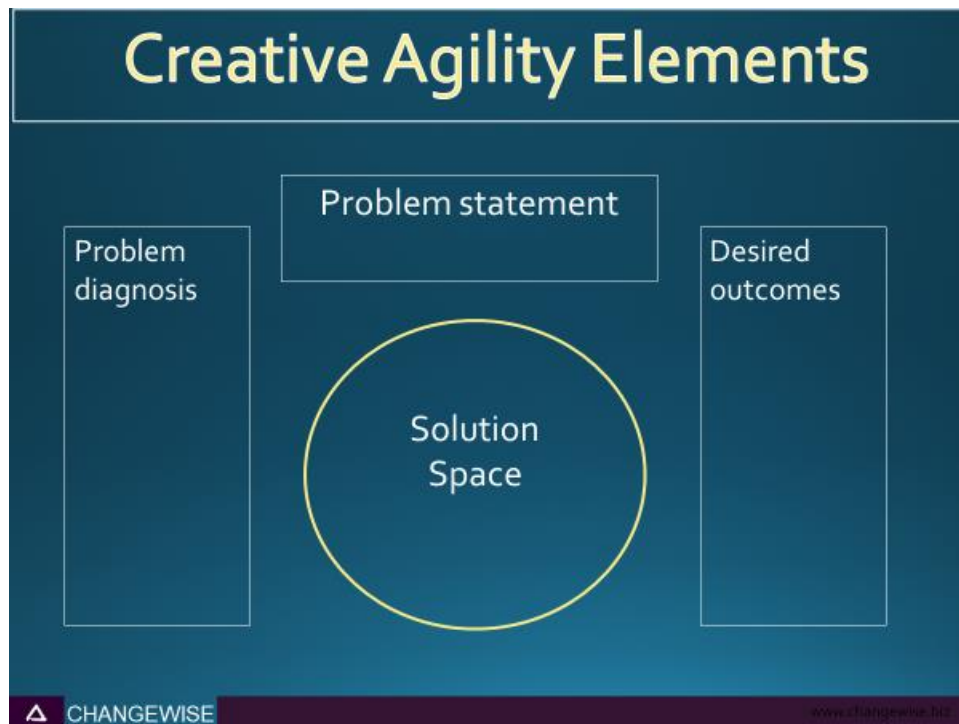
The other element has to do with desired outcomes. We make an important distinction between solutions to a problem and the outcomes that the solution-set needs to achieve. Here's a simple example:

Let's say that the problem we have is that we need people to be able to move back and forth across this river without needing to swim across. But that there is, as yet, no way to do this.

In this simple example, providing a way to cross the river without swimming is the "desired outcome." The outcome differs from the solution in that a number of different solutions may be possible. For example, one solution would be to build a bridge. Another would be to install a ferry that could take people back and forth. Another might be a helicopter service.

The best solution will be the one that best achieves the desired result. In real life there would likely be additional outcomes the solution would need to achieve, for example, having to do with cost and how long the solution would take to implement.

Creative Agility Elements

Problem statement

Problem diagnosis

Desired outcomes

Solution Space

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Coming back to the diagram of Creative Agility elements, whether we share this with coaching clients or simply hold this in mind during a coaching session, this can be a useful tool in helping our client – and ourselves – get our bearings and to "set" the problem in what is usually a more complete way. For this reason, we have pasted it into the workbook for the group session on Creative Agility, so you can use it as a reference during the coaching practice in breakouts, if you think that would be helpful.

Creative Agility Capacities

Reflective Judgment	How you discover what's true (problem diagnosis) and what's are the best solutions for ill-structured problems How you justify your diagnosis and solutions to yourself and others
Connective Awareness	The ability to hold multiple ideas in mind, compare and contrast them, and make meaningful connections between them The inclusiveness of one's orientation toward polarities.

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From here, I'd like to lay out the relevant Building Blocks for coaching on Creative Agility. I'm going to start by highlighting one more thing from the King and Kitchener book, which is: What exactly do they mean by reflective judgment? As we look at this, let's keep in mind that we're taking about responding to ill-structured problems.

The degree of development a leader's capacity for reflective judgment first of all impacts how they determine what they believe is true, in this case, what they believe is true about the problem. Secondly, it impacts how they go about arriving at what they feel is the best solution. And thirdly, it shapes how leaders justify their views on problem diagnosis and the best solution both to themselves and to others.

In studying King and Kitchener's developmental stages, I came to believe that there's another important capacity involved in what they call reflective judgment. This is a capacity I think is worth understanding in its own right. I've come to call this additional capacity "connective awareness."

Connective awareness is the ability to hold multiple ideas in mind, compare and contrast them, and make meaningful connections between them. This includes one's orientation toward polarities, or what appear to be opposite ways of describing something or opposite courses of action.

At the Conformer stage, the one before Expert, polarities are seen as absolute and as irreconcilable. At the Expert stage, leaders realize that each polarity is not absolute, that there are, for example, different degrees of "goodness" or "badness." But they still tend to see polarities as irreconcilable.

At the Achiever stage, leaders see that polarities are related across a full continuum. From this perspective, polar opposites can be reconciled through a process of compromise between the two extremes. At the Catalyst stage, leaders see that, at least some of the time, each polarity is true and valid in its own way, and that what may initially appear to be contradictory is actually a paradox. This is one of the capacities that fuels the Catalyst's interest and ability to pursue true win-win outcomes.
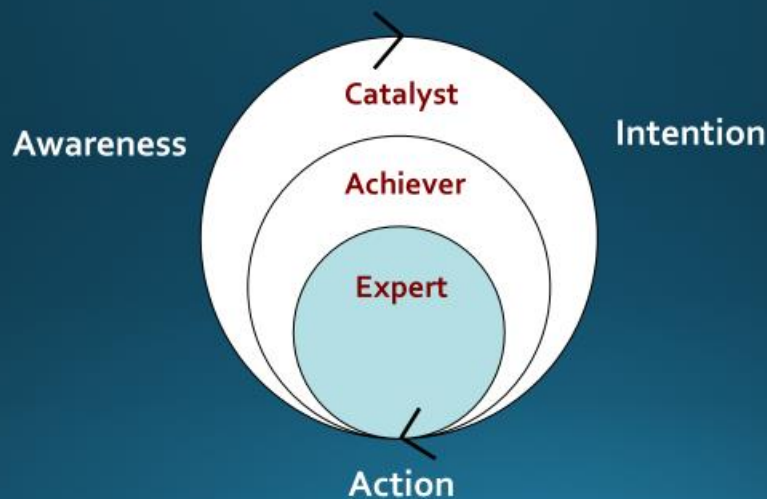
Creative Agility: Expert to Achiever

	Expert	Achiever
Capacities	• Reflective judgment: Realizes there are no absolutes, but identifies with own opinions • Connective awareness: Sees polarities non-absolutely but mutually exclusive	• Reflective judgment: Realizes s/he could bring some bias • Connective awareness: Holds opposing views & tries to take into account
Leadership behavior	• Diagnosing problems: Analyzes problem specifics & makes own judgment • Solving problems: Make own judgments	• Diagnosing problems: Identifies patterns across problems • Solving problems: Tests solution ideas with data to help predict outcomes

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Creative Agility:
Achiever to Catalyst

|	Achiever	Catalyst
Capacities	• Reflective judgment: Realizes s/he could bring some bias • Connective awareness: Holds opposing views & tries to take into account	• Reflective judgment: Can purposefully suspend judgment • Connective awareness: Sees issues + possibilities in the "human system"
Leadership behavior	• Diagnosing problems: Identifies patterns across problems • Solving problems: Tests solution ideas with data to help predict outcomes	• Diagnosing problems: Includes underlying causes in culture, group dynamics • Solving problems: Applies critical thinking **after** generating solution ideas

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Levels of Reflective Action
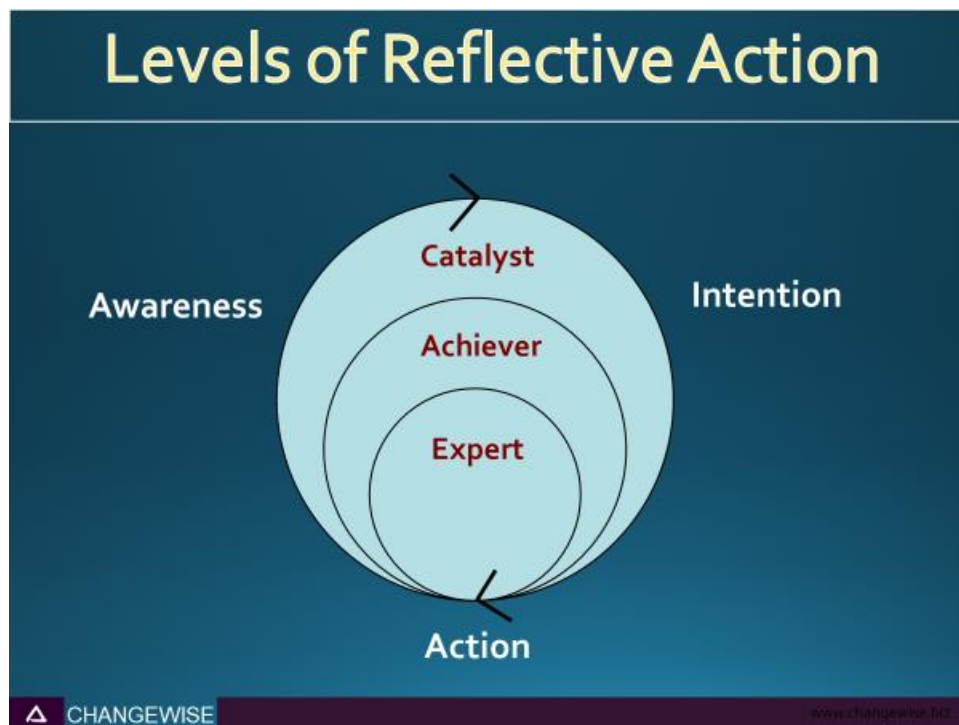
Awareness

Catalyst

Achiever

Expert

Intention

Action

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And now, the final tier of building blocks: Level of reflective action, also known as level of awareness and intent. What ultimately supports the shift from Expert to Achiever Creative Agility is this expansion in a leader's capacity for reflective action. From this:

To this:

Levels of Reflective Action

And to this:
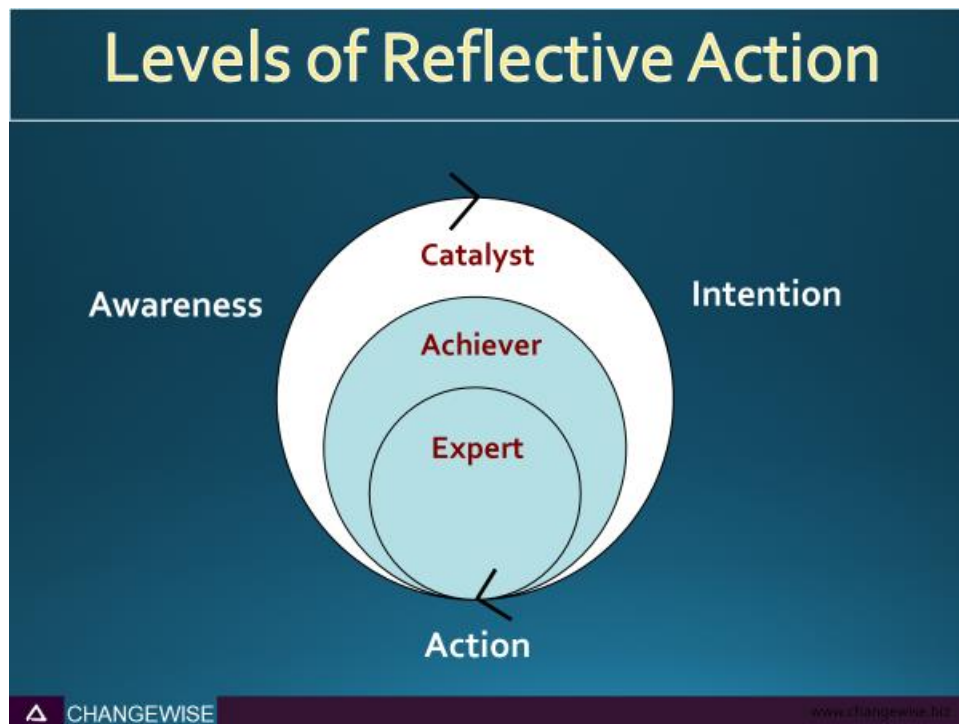
Levels of Reflective Action

More specifically, here's what the shift from Expert to Achiever reflective action entails:

Levels of Awareness and Intent

	Expert	Achiever
Intent	To solve problems and make incremental improvements	To achieve desired outcomes for valued institutions
Awareness	Modest reflective capacity Focuses on one problem, person, one part of the organization at a time	Robust reflective capacity – seeing context, making connections, seeing relationships Sees teams, organizations, and industries as systems

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A leader's level of intentionality shifts beyond solving specific problems and making incremental improvements to focus on achieve desired outcomes. The level of awareness expands from a modest reflective capacity, where the leader focuses on one problem at a time, to a robust reflective capacity, where the leader is able to see the larger business context and see patterns between problems.

Levels of Awareness and Intent

	Achiever	Catalyst
Intent	To achieve desired outcomes for valued institutions	To create satisfying human contexts that enable sustained achievement of desired outcomes
Awareness	Robust reflective capacity – seeing context, making connections, seeing relationships Sees teams, organizations, and industries as systems	Add: Able to "reflect in the moment" Can see and appreciate the "human system" underlying business and organizational systems

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Moving on to the development of Catalyst-level reflective action, Catalysts retain the ability to engage in Expert and Achiever reflective action, when that's all that's needed, but they also develop a new level of awareness and intentionality.

The awareness aspect involves learning to "reflect in the moment." Specifically, what develops is a curiosity and ability to become aware of parts of yourself of which you've formerly been unaware. This often leads to the realization that you are not as limited but also not as consistently effective as you previously thought you were. This can include awareness of newly discovered feelings and assumptions, as well as realizing you've just behaved differently than you intended.

This kind of reflection results in a heightened awareness of the leader's internal thoughts and feelings. It also generates an interest and appreciation of the importance of human processes generally, for example, the human dimensions of working relationships, team functioning, and organizational culture. This is why Catalysts are able to see and appreciate the human systems that underlie the organizational structures and business processes that are so evident to the Achiever.

The intentionality aspect of Catalyst reflective action is what helps them shift into a post-heroic leadership orientation. This means going beyond an intent to achieve desired outcomes to develop a new underlying motivation, which is "to create satisfying human contexts that enable sustained achievement of desired outcomes." This is a post-heroic leadership orientation, where it's not so much about **you** achieving outcomes through your team, and it's more about creating highly satisfying and effective relationships, teams, and organizations that support others in **their** achievement of valued outcomes.

Workbook

Now that you've viewed this mini-webinar, please go to your workbook for this session, read the 2-page case study, and answer the reflection questions on page 5.