



## Reasoning Repertoire Deck: Minimum Working Set

*A learning, facilitation, and  
reflective-practice resource  
for better judgment*

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## ABOUT THIS DECK

The **Reasoning Repertoire Deck: Minimum Working Set** introduces the nine reasoning styles most often needed in nonprofit board deliberation.

It is a practical learning, facilitation, and reflective-practice resource for directors, chairs, committees, executives, and governance educators.

The deck helps users recognise, select, combine, and practise valid reasoning styles so board judgment becomes more deliberate, disciplined, and accountable.

Use it as flashcards, reflective prompts, planning aids, or a group facilitation resource.



The ring icon represents the full repertoire of 21 valid reasoning styles. This minimum set introduces the nine styles directors are most likely to need as a starting repertoire. Lucid Empathy sits at the centre as a balancing capacity used across the repertoire whenever human consequence is involved.

## FROM MINIMUM SET TO FULL REPERTOIRE

The full Reasoning Repertoire contains 21 valid reasoning styles. This deck introduces a minimum working set: Linear, Recursive, Inductive, Abductive, Probabilistic, Proportional, Systems, Ethical, and Strategic Reasoning.

Later stages introduce the extended and context-sensitive styles\*, Practical Reasoning Map elements, enabling capacities, distorted reasoning forms, and distorting conditions.

**Lucid Empathy** is included as a balancing card. It is not an additional reasoning style.

*\*Extended and context-sensitive styles:  
Deductive · Analogical · Counterfactual ·  
Cyclical · Nonlinear · Dialectical · Narrative ·  
Categorical · Ecological · Topological ·  
Morphological · Fuzzy*

## STRATEGIC REASONING



### Definition

Considers action in relation to purpose, actors, incentives, timing, constraints, and response.

### Core governance question

*What should we do, given purpose, context, actors, timing, and consequence?*

### Use when

The issue involves direction, positioning, partnership, advocacy, growth, contraction, or sustainability.

### Helps notice

Actors · incentives · trade-offs · timing · positioning · responses · constraints

### Board prompt

*What is the strategic choice, and what are we saying no to?*

### Watch for drift

Gamesmanship · opportunism · reputation management · heroic overreach

### Pair with

Probabilistic · Systems · Ethical · Narrative · Ecological

### Mental models

Actor map · Scenario pathway · Game board

### Practice cue

Map actors, assumptions, likely responses, trade-offs, and early-warning indicators.

## LINEAR REASONING



### Definition

Organises action through sequence, steps, order, responsibility, timing, and progression.

### Core governance question

*What needs to happen, in what order, and by whom?*

### Use when

The issue involves implementation, process, escalation, planning, procedure, or review pathways.

### Helps notice

Sequence · steps · timing · dependencies · responsibility · milestones

### Board prompt

*What must happen first, next, later, and under whose authority?*

### Watch for drift

Proceduralism · illusion of linearity · false simplicity

### Pair with

Systems · Recursive · Probabilistic · Ethical · Proportional

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Roadmap · Sequence chain · Critical path

### Practice cue

Create a sequence map, then add dependencies, risks, and review points.

## PROBABILISTIC REASONING



### Definition

Assesses likelihood, uncertainty, confidence, risk, and possible variation across scenarios.

### Core governance question

*What is likely, uncertain, risky, or confidence-limited?*

### Use when

The issue involves risk, forecasts, incomplete evidence, assumptions, or uncertain outcomes.

### Helps notice

Likelihood · uncertainty · confidence · assumptions · scenarios · review triggers

### Board prompt

*Are we confusing severity, likelihood, and confidence?*

### Watch for drift

False precision · certainty inflation · risk theatre · unjustified reassurance

### Pair with

Systems · Counterfactual · Ethical · Proportional · Strategic

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Confidence range · Scenario tree · Risk matrix

### Practice cue

Name the key assumptions, rate confidence, and set one review trigger.

## ETHICAL REASONING



### Definition

Evaluates decisions through duties, harms, fairness, dignity, care, legitimacy, and responsibility.

### Core governance question

*What is fair, responsible, legitimate, or consistent with duty and dignity?*

### Use when

The decision affects people, rights, fairness, trust, harm, legitimacy, or mission integrity.

### Helps notice

Duties · harms · fairness · dignity · care · legitimacy · responsibility

### Board prompt

*What ought we to do, not only what can we do?*

### Watch for drift

Moralised reasoning · purity language · values rhetoric · moral closure

### Pair with

Proportional · Probabilistic · Systems · Narrative · Strategic

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Harm-benefit balance · Duties map · Responsibility lens

### Practice cue

Name affected parties, duties, harms, mitigations, and review commitments.

## PROPORTIONAL REASONING



### Definition

Calibrates response to significance, risk, harm, burden, benefit, evidence, and consequence.

### Core governance question

*Is our response proportionate to the seriousness of the matter?*

### Use when

The issue involves risk, harm, sanctions, resource allocation, evidence thresholds, or agenda time.

### Helps notice

Scale · burden · seriousness · benefit · harm · evidence · response

### Board prompt

*Are we overreacting, underreacting, or matching response to significance?*

### Watch for drift

False equivalence · minimisation · overreaction · performative balance

### Pair with

Ethical · Probabilistic · Systems · Narrative · Strategic

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Balance scale · Ratio · Threshold of seriousness

### Practice cue

Compare seriousness, evidence, burden, benefit, and response before deciding.

## INDUCTIVE REASONING



### Definition

Moves from observations, examples, cases, or data toward broader patterns and generalisations.

### Core governance question

*What pattern is emerging, and how strong is the evidence?*

### Use when

The issue involves trends, complaints, dashboard data, evaluation findings, incidents, or repeated signals.

### Helps notice

Patterns · trends · samples · evidence · repetition · contrary cases

### Board prompt

*Is this an isolated case, emerging pattern, or established trend?*

### Watch for drift

Hasty generalisation · anecdotal reasoning · cherry-picking

### Pair with

Abductive · Probabilistic · Counterfactual · Systems · Ethical

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Evidence ladder · Pattern map · Sample-to-trend

### Practice cue

Classify evidence as anecdote, case, pattern, trend, or causal claim.

## ABDUCTIVE REASONING



### Definition

Generates, compares, and tests plausible explanations for what may be happening.

### Core governance question

*What best explains this, and what else could explain it?*

### Use when

The issue involves diagnosis, anomalies, complaints, unexplained change, risk signals, or implementation failure.

### Helps notice

Hypotheses · explanations · diagnosis · fit · alternatives · inquiry

### Board prompt

*Are we testing explanations, or protecting the first plausible one?*

### Watch for drift

Premature diagnosis · explaining away · blame reasoning

### Pair with

Inductive · Probabilistic · Counterfactual · Systems · Ethical

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Diagnostic tree · Hypothesis set · Best-fit explanation

### Practice cue

Generate three explanations, then test evidence for and against each.

## RECURSIVE REASONING



### Definition

Uses feedback from action, consequence, review, or learning to revise future judgment.

### Core governance question

*How should what we learn change what we do next?*

### Use when

The issue involves review, adaptation, implementation feedback, policy revision, or organisational learning.

### Helps notice

Feedback · learning loops · revision · iteration · consequences · adaptation

### Board prompt

*How should what we learned from the last cycle change this decision?*

### Watch for drift

Circular self-confirmation · learning theatre · endless review · no changed practice

### Pair with

Inductive · Counterfactual · Linear · Ethical · Systems

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Learning loop · Iteration cycle · Review trigger

### Practice cue

Name one lesson, one assumption to revise, and one practice to change.

## SYSTEMS REASONING



### Definition

Understands issues through interdependence, feedback, delay, and interaction among parts.

### Core governance question

*What interdependencies, feedback loops, and wider effects matter?*

### Use when

The issue involves dependencies, recurring patterns, indirect effects, or unintended consequences.

### Helps notice

Relationships · feedback loops · delays · dependencies · flow-on effects · leverage points

### Board prompt

*What flow-on effects and risks might arise from this decision?*

### Watch for drift

Overcomplexification · vague connection-talk · responsibility diffusion

### Pair with

Linear · Proportional · Probabilistic · Ethical · Strategic

### Mental models / useful scaffolds

Feedback loop · Ecosystem · Leverage point

### Practice cue

Map the system, then identify one leverage point, one likely risk, and one review trigger.

## LUCID EMPATHY



### Definition

Keeps human consequence visible while preserving evidence, fairness, role clarity, and accountability.

### Core question

*Who is affected, what do they experience, and how do we remain disciplined?*

### Use when

Human consequence may be ignored, sentimentalised, politicised, over-absorbed, or abstracted away.

### Helps notice

Dignity · vulnerability · lived experience · harm · trust · repair · relational consequence

### Avoids three failures:

- **Absence:** people disappear
- **Capture:** one experience overwhelms judgment
- **Overreach:** care becomes paternalism or manipulation

### Pair with

Use across the full repertoire wherever human consequence is involved.

### Corrective prompt

*How do we keep people visible without abandoning evidence, fairness, agency, and responsibility?*

### Practice cue

Name the affected people, evidence, duties, limits, and responsibilities.