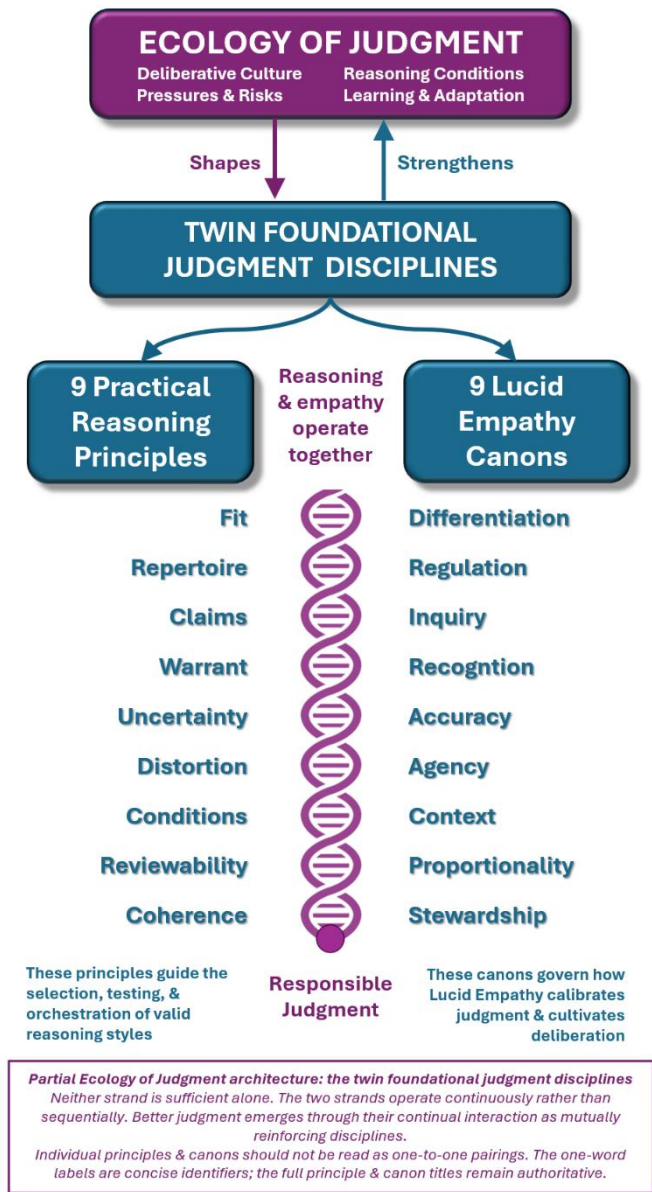


THE TWIN FOUNDATIONAL JUDGMENT DISCIPLINES: PRACTICAL REASONING PRINCIPLES AND LUCID EMPATHY CANONS



Introduction

Nonprofit leaders seeking to improve their deliberation and decision-making will benefit from reflection on the systems they are using to support these key functions. These systems are characterised here as the 'Ecology of Judgment'.

This resource paper focuses on the principles that guide practical reasoning and canons that govern the disciplined exercise of Lucid Empathy. Principles are especially important in novel, complex or contested situations where established procedures provide incomplete guidance. They also help leaders interpret and apply existing procedures responsibly rather than treating compliance as a substitute for judgment.

The adjacent chart is a portion of a more complete description of the Ecology of Judgment, which emphasises the integration of sound reasoning with ethical and disciplined consideration of the human consequences of decisions and the decision-making process (Lucid Empathy). A more detailed analysis of the full deliberative ecosystem is planned for later release.

The double helix symbol represents the continuous interaction of the twin disciplines. Practical Reasoning and Lucid Empathy operate together rather than sequentially, with Responsible Judgment emerging from their integration.

The nine Practical Reasoning Principles inform the use of valid reasoning styles within your 'reasoning

repertoire'. (See the blog article [Expanding Your Reasoning Repertoire](#) for details on the full repertoire of 21 valid reasoning styles).

The nine Lucid Empathy Canons govern two complementary applications of the discipline. They help calibrate judgment by keeping reasoning attentive to human perspectives and consequences, and they help cultivate deliberation by supporting accurate understanding, dignity, agency, protected dissent and professional respect among participants.

The enclosed material describes each principle and canon and specifies their functions. While a list format is used, readers are urged to keep in mind that the **principles and canons are not employed sequentially or in any priority order**. Multiple principles and canons may be engaged at any point in a deliberation, and re-engaged as the matter is prepared, framed, deliberated, decided and reviewed.

Practical Reasoning Principles

These nine principles govern the reasoning strand of disciplined judgment. They guide the selection, testing and orchestration of valid reasoning styles.

Principle 1 - Match Reasoning to the Task

Select reasoning approaches that fit the nature, significance, uncertainty, and purpose of the matter under consideration.

Function: Ensures judgment employs the most appropriate reasoning disciplines rather than relying on familiar habits or preferred styles.

Principle 2 - Use a Repertoire, Not a Habit

Draw on multiple valid reasoning styles, combining them as circumstances require rather than depending on a single preferred approach.

Function: Broadens judgment, reduces blind spots, and improves the robustness of deliberation.

Principle 3 - Distinguish the Kind of Claim Being Made

Identify whether claims are factual, causal, evaluative, normative, predictive, strategic, or interpretive before deciding how they should be assessed.

Function: Aligns standards of evidence and reasoning with the nature of the claim being considered.

Principle 4 - Test Support, Not Conviction

Evaluate the quality of evidence, warrants, assumptions, and coherence rather than relying on confidence, assertion, or consensus.

Function: Protects intellectual integrity by grounding conclusions in justified support rather than persuasive certainty.

Principle 5 - Treat Uncertainty Honestly

Acknowledge ambiguity, probability, complexity, and incomplete knowledge instead of presenting provisional judgments as certainty.

Function: Encourages intellectual humility while improving transparency, adaptability, and decision quality.

Principle 6 - Expect Distortion

Recognise that valid reasoning can become distorted through overuse, isolation, cognitive bias, emotional pressure, or organisational conditions.

Function: Promotes early diagnosis and correction before distortions compromise judgment.

Principle 7 - Diagnose Conditions, Not Only Content

Examine how contextual, organisational, interpersonal, and systemic conditions may be shaping the reasoning process itself.

Function: Draws attention to influences that may strengthen or undermine disciplined deliberation beyond the arguments alone.

Principle 8 - Keep Judgment Revisable and Accountable

Maintain conclusions as open to revision where evidence, context, or consequences change, while remaining able to explain and justify decisions.

Function: Supports responsible learning, transparent governance, and continuing improvement in judgment.

Principle 9 - Make Room for Tension and Test Coherence

Sustain competing perspectives and values long enough to examine whether claims, assumptions, evidence, and conclusions form a coherent whole.

Function: Prevents premature closure while strengthening the consistency and quality of collective reasoning.



Lucid Empathy Canons

The nine Lucid Empathy Canons govern the empathic strand of disciplined judgment. They operate as guardrails against predictable distortions in the practice, interpretation and governance of empathy. They therefore address both the quality of the conclusion and the quality of the deliberative relationship - preserving boundaries, regulation, accuracy, context, proportionality, legitimate disagreement, institutional stewardship, respectful recognition and personal agency.

Canon 1 - Differentiation Before Identification

Empathy must preserve self-other distinction.

Function: Protects boundary integrity, prevents fusion, and maintains role clarity.

Canon 2 - Regulation Before Expression

Empathy must be regulated before it is acted upon.

Function: Ensures empathy stabilises rather than destabilises judgment under load.

Canon 3 - Inquiry Before Interpretation

Empathy requires disciplined curiosity and verification.

Function: Guards epistemic accuracy and reduces projection or misattribution.

Canon 4 - Recognition Before Rebuttal

Empathic understanding should be demonstrated before a person's position is challenged or rejected.

Function: Supports professional courtesy, reduces avoidable defensiveness, and enables disagreement without denying dignity or misrepresenting another's perspective.

Canon 5 - Accuracy Before Agreement

Seek an accurate understanding of another's perspective without treating understanding as agreement or endorsement.

Function: Protects empathic accuracy, fiduciary responsibility, ethical judgment and legitimate dissent.

Canon 6 - Agency Before Influence

Empathy must preserve the other person's voice, ownership and freedom of response.

Function: Prevents manipulation, rescuing, coercive persuasion and ownership displacement, while supporting participation and responsible self-determination.

Canon 7 - Context Before Conclusion

Empathy must account for systems, power, history, and structural conditions.

Function: Embeds empathic understanding within governance reality and legitimacy.

Canon 8 - Proportionality Before Immersion

Empathy must be scaled to role, consequence, and capacity.

Function: Protects sustainability, prevents overreach, and preserves deliberative clarity.

Canon 9 - Stewardship Before Sentiment

Empathy must be governed as a shared institutional resource.

Function: Elevates empathy from interpersonal virtue to accountable infrastructure.



Synthesis

The principles and canons should not be treated as parallel checklists or matched one to one. They are mutually reinforcing disciplines applied throughout deliberation. Practical Reasoning tests claims, evidence, uncertainty and coherence; Lucid Empathy keeps human consequence, relationship, agency and responsibility within the field of judgment. Responsible Judgment emerges through their continuous interaction.

Foundational Disciplines for Judgment

*Twin disciplines woven together to produce responsible judgment**

PRACTICAL REASONING PRINCIPLES

1. Match Reasoning to the Task
2. Use a Repertoire, Not a Habit
3. Distinguish the Kind of Claim Being Made
4. Test Support, Not Conviction
5. Treat Uncertainty Honestly
6. Expect Distortion
7. Diagnose Conditions, Not Only Content
8. Keep Judgment Revisable & Accountable
9. Make Room for Tension & Test Coherence

The principles guide the selection,
testing & orchestration of valid
reasoning styles



**Responsible
Judgment**

LUCID EMPATHY CANONS

1. Differentiation Before Identification
2. Regulation Before Expression
3. Inquiry Before Interpretation
4. Recognition Before Rebuttal
5. Accuracy Before Agreement
6. Agency Before Influence
7. Context Before Conclusion
8. Proportionality Before Immersion
9. Stewardship Before Sentiment

*The canons safeguard the
interpretation, expression &
governance of Lucid Empathy*

**Responsible judgment integrates disciplined reasoning, Lucid Empathy and
responsible stewardship so that the human significance of decisions remains in view.**

** Neither strand is sufficient alone: the two operate continuously rather than sequentially, and individual principles and
canons should not be read as one-to-one pairings. Numbers are reference identifiers, not stages or rankings.*

See Also

For more information on the Ecology of Judgment see the series of articles on this theme at the [Taking Care of the Present blog](#).