

Harvard Business Review

The Focused Leader

Based on the article by Daniel Goleman
Harvard Business Review, December 2013

Presented to you by:
SMEJNK'S!

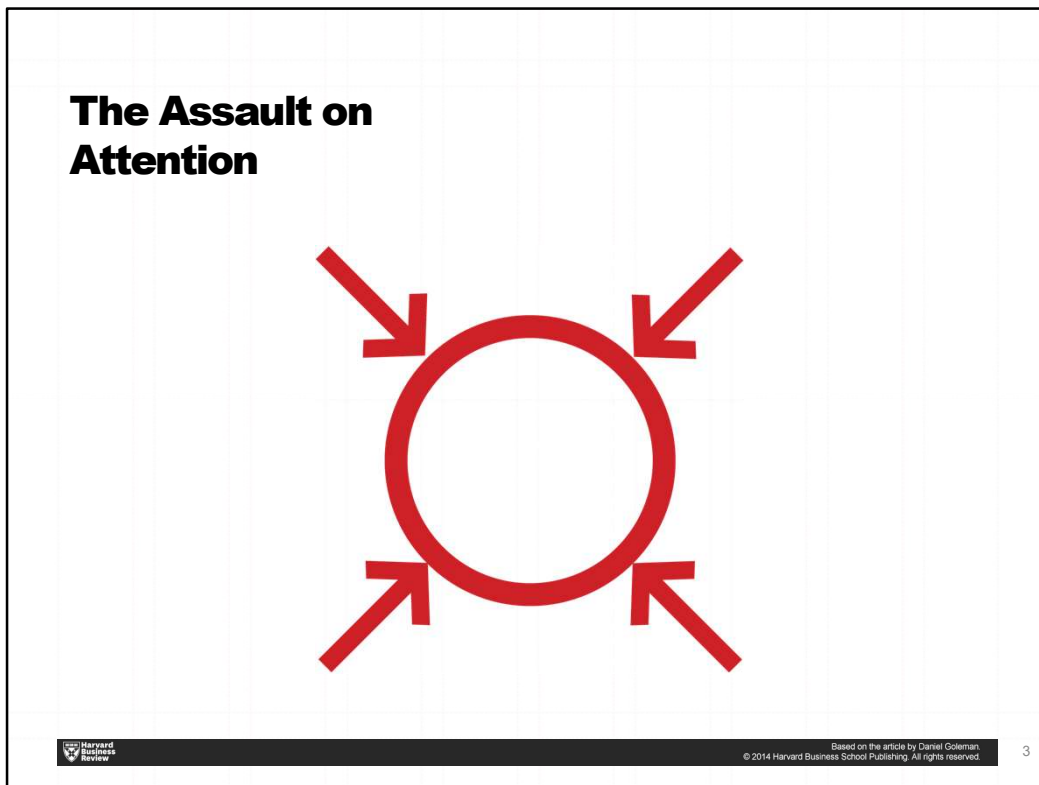
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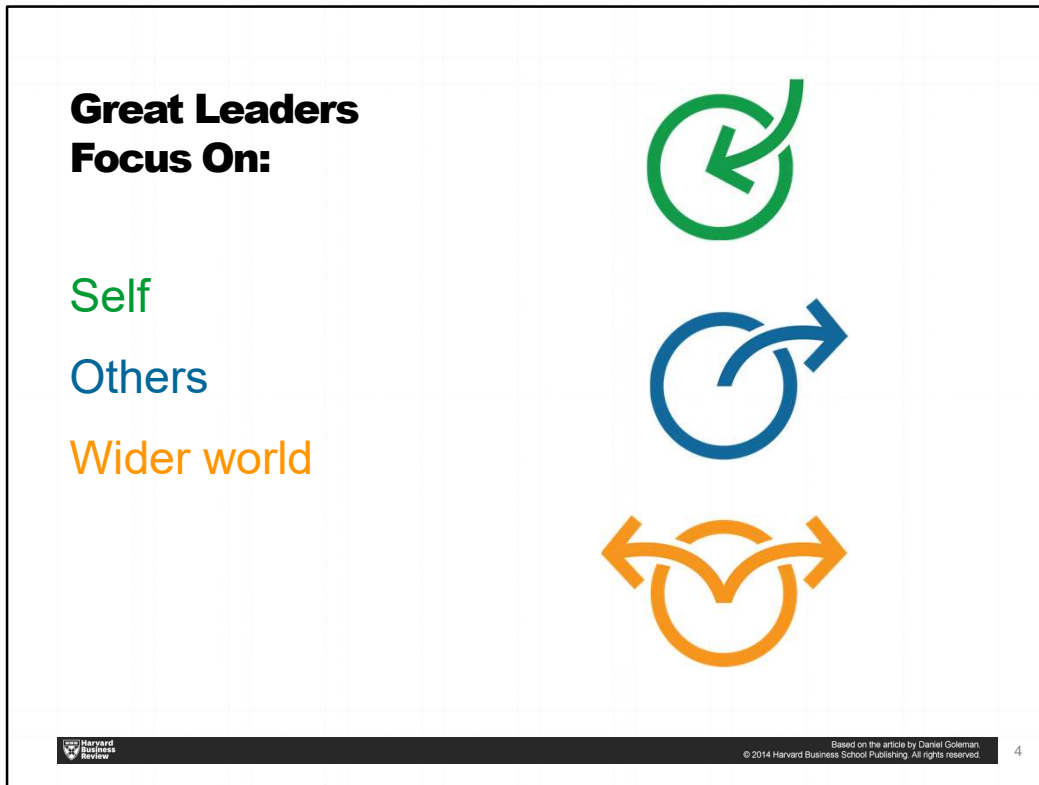
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HOW TO USE THIS DECK

- Use the following slides to present and discuss the ideas in the article.
- Each slide includes talking points in the notes field.
- Customize the slides as needed. You may want to insert them into your own presentation, add your organization's branding, revise the slide text or the talking points, or insert new slides.
- The complete deck takes approximately 15 minutes to present.
- If you want to do a shorter presentation that covers the basic concepts, delete the slides marked **EXERCISE**.



- Directing others' attention is a primary task of leadership. But to do it well, leaders must be able to focus their *own* attention.
- And these days, that's difficult. A constant onslaught of information leads to sloppy shortcuts—triaging e-mail by reading only the subject lines, skipping voice mails, skimming memos and reports.
- We think we're reducing distractions, but these habits actually make us *less* focused.



- People commonly think of focus as directing your attention to one thing while filtering out other things.
- But research shows that we focus in many different ways for different purposes.
- The various types fall into three broad categories.
 - The first two—focusing on *self* and focusing on *others*—help you develop emotional intelligence. The third, focusing on the *wider world*, can improve your ability to devise strategy, innovate, and manage organizations.
- Fortunately, you can become a more focused leader with the right kinds of exercise.

Focus on Self


Self-awareness

Self-control



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- Focusing your attention on yourself involves self-awareness, or getting in touch with your inner voice. This is where emotional intelligence begins.
- It also involves self-control, or willpower—which allows you to put your attention where you want it and keep it there despite the temptation to wander.



Self-Awareness

Reading your gut instincts


Being authentic

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- Self-awareness has two aspects.
- The first is interpreting, but not blindly following, what your gut or your inner voice tells you to do.
- This means paying careful attention to various physiological signals—your heartbeat, your breath, and so on. The more closely you read them, the better you’ll use your intuition.
- Studies bear this out. Consider what a British research group learned when analyzing interviews with 118 professional traders and 10 senior managers at four City of London investment banks.
- The most successful traders—those with an annual average income of £500,000—didn’t rely on just their gut instincts or analytics. They focused on a full range of emotions when judging the value of their intuition. When they suffered losses, they acknowledged their anxiety, became more cautious, and took fewer risks.
- In contrast, the least successful traders (whose income averaged only £100,000) tended to stick with their initial instincts, ignoring their anxiety. They made poorer decisions because they failed to heed a wider array of internal signals.



Self-Awareness

Reading your gut instincts

Being authentic

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- The second aspect is authenticity, or being the same person to others as you are to yourself.
- This involves paying attention to what others think of you, particularly people you trust.
- The variety of focus that's critical here is "open awareness," in which we broadly notice what's going on around us without judging, censoring, or tuning out.
- Leaders who aren't accustomed to receiving input in this way may find this tricky. Matching your view of yourself with how your most trusted colleagues see you is a good way to check your authenticity.

Developing Open Awareness

EXER

S K O E 4 R T 2 H P

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- Quickly glance at these letters and numbers. Now look away.
- How many numbers are in there?
- Now look again. In scanning the stream, many people will notice the first number, 4, but after that, their attention blinks.
- Those firmly in open-awareness mode will register the second number as well.
- Like a camera lens, you can focus expansively or narrowly. Open awareness is a matter of attitude adjustment—taking things in and being willing to lose a certain amount of control.

Self-Control

The Marshmallow Test

NOW

15 MINUTES

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- Now let's talk about self-control, or willpower. The scientific term for this is *cognitive control*.
- Studies show how powerful self-control is and how important it is to success.
- In what has become known as the “marshmallow test,” researchers gave 1,037 children—all born in the same year—a choice between eating one marshmallow right away and getting two by waiting 15 minutes.
- Those with the cognitive control to hold out for two marshmallows grew up to be significantly healthier, more successful financially, and more law-abiding than those who hadn't been able to wait.
- In fact, statistical analysis showed that a child's level of self-control was a more powerful predictor of financial success than IQ, social class, or family circumstance.

Developing Self-Control

E X E R



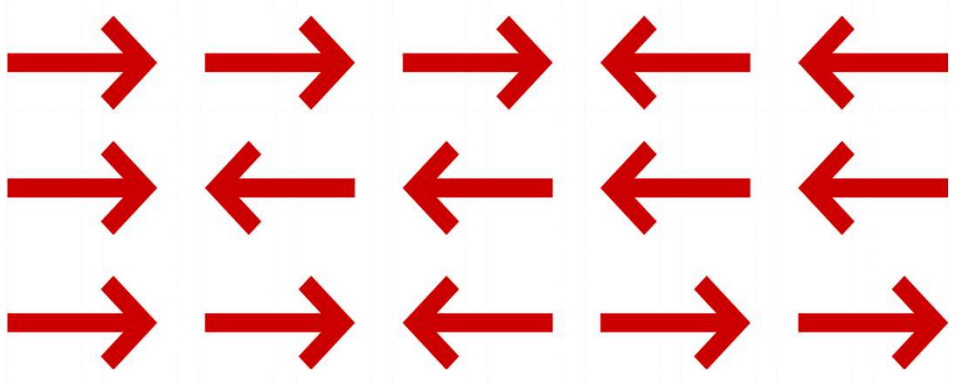
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- People show good self-control when they stay calm in a crisis, tame their own agitation, and are able to recover from defeat.
- You can strengthen yours through simple games like Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light, or any exercise in which you're asked to stop on cue.
- Research shows that getting better at playing Musical Chairs helps children strengthen their prefrontal wiring for cognitive control. It's never too late for adults to strengthen these circuits as well.
- You can also try daily sessions of mindfulness practice: Focus your attention on your breathing and try tracking your thoughts and feelings without getting swept away by them.
- Whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, simply return it to your breath. It sounds easy, but try it for 10 minutes and you'll find there's a learning curve.

Developing Self-Control

EXER



The diagram shows three rows of five red arrows each. In the first row, the first three arrows point right and the last two point left. In the second row, the first arrow points right and the other four point left. In the third row, the first two arrows point right, the third points left, and the last two point right.

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- Take a look at these arrows. In what direction is the middle arrow in each row pointing?
- This is called the Eriksen Flanker Task, and it gauges your susceptibility to distraction. When giving this test in labs, researchers measure how quickly people perceive which way the middle arrows are pointing. Differences as small as a thousandth of a second can be detected.
- The stronger your cognitive control, the less susceptible you are to distraction by the surrounding arrows.

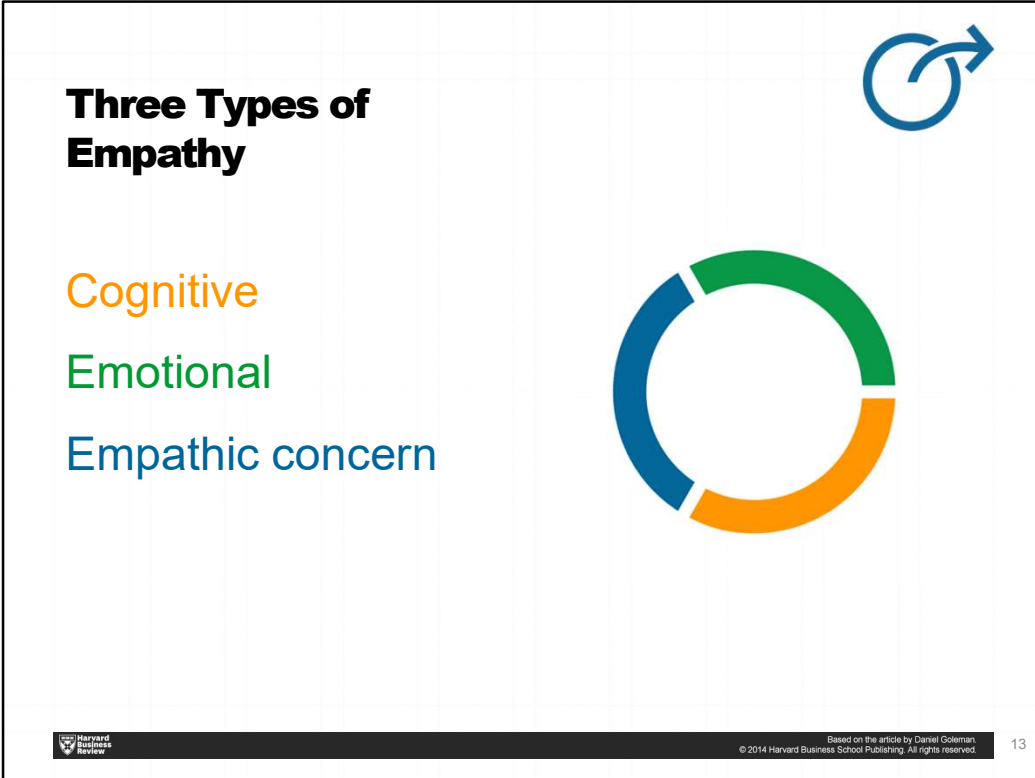
Focus on Others

Empathy
Relationships



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- Focusing attention on others is required for empathy and building strong relationships.
- Executives who do this well are easy to spot: They are the ones who find common ground, the ones whose opinions carry the most weight, the ones others want to work with.
- They often emerge as natural leaders, regardless of title or position.



The slide features a title 'Three Types of Empathy' in bold black text. To the right is a blue circular refresh icon. Below the title, three types of empathy are listed: 'Cognitive' in orange, 'Emotional' in green, and 'Empathic concern' in blue. A circular diagram to the right consists of three segments: a blue segment at the top-left, a green segment at the top-right, and an orange segment at the bottom. The Harvard Business Review logo is in the bottom-left corner, and a copyright notice and page number '13' are in the bottom-right corner.

Three Types of Empathy

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Empathic concern

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- There are three distinct types of empathy:
 - Cognitive empathy—the ability to understand another person’s perspective
 - Emotional empathy—the ability to feel what someone else feels
 - Empathic concern—the ability to sense what another person needs from you

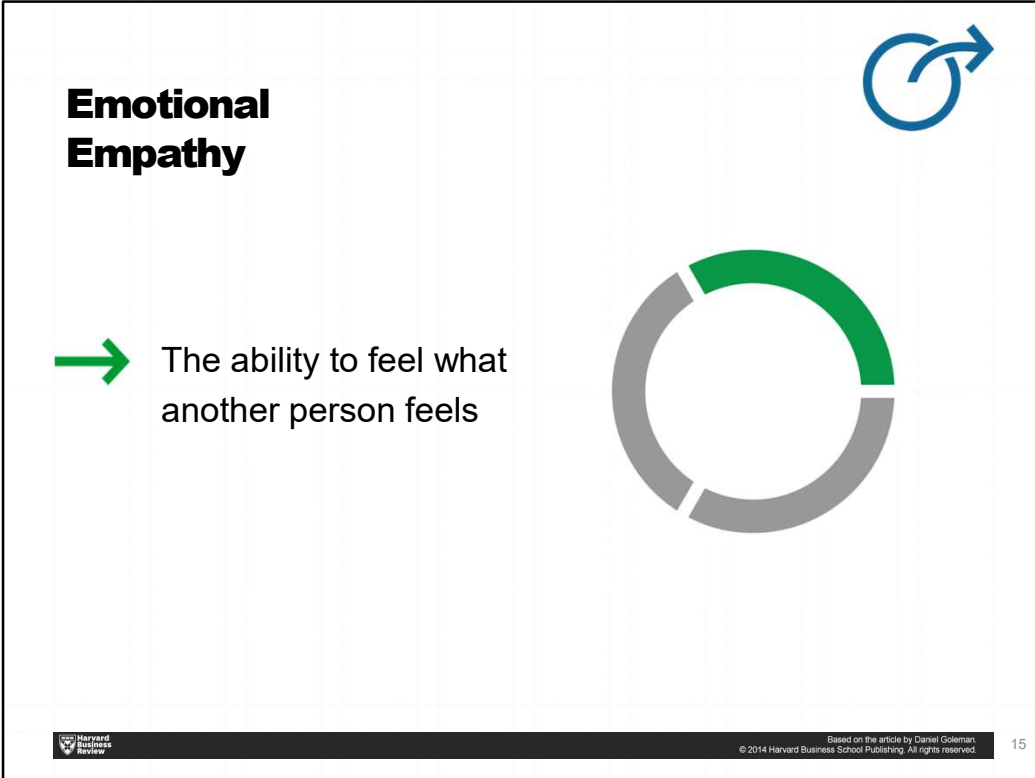
Cognitive Empathy

→ The ability to understand another person's perspective

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- Cognitive empathy enables you to explain yourself in ways that will resonate with others—a skill essential to getting the best performance from direct reports.
- It requires you to think about feelings rather than feel them directly.
- Cognitive empathy is an outgrowth of self-awareness. The same circuits that allow you to look at your own thoughts and monitor the feelings that flow from them help you do the same for other people's thoughts and feelings.



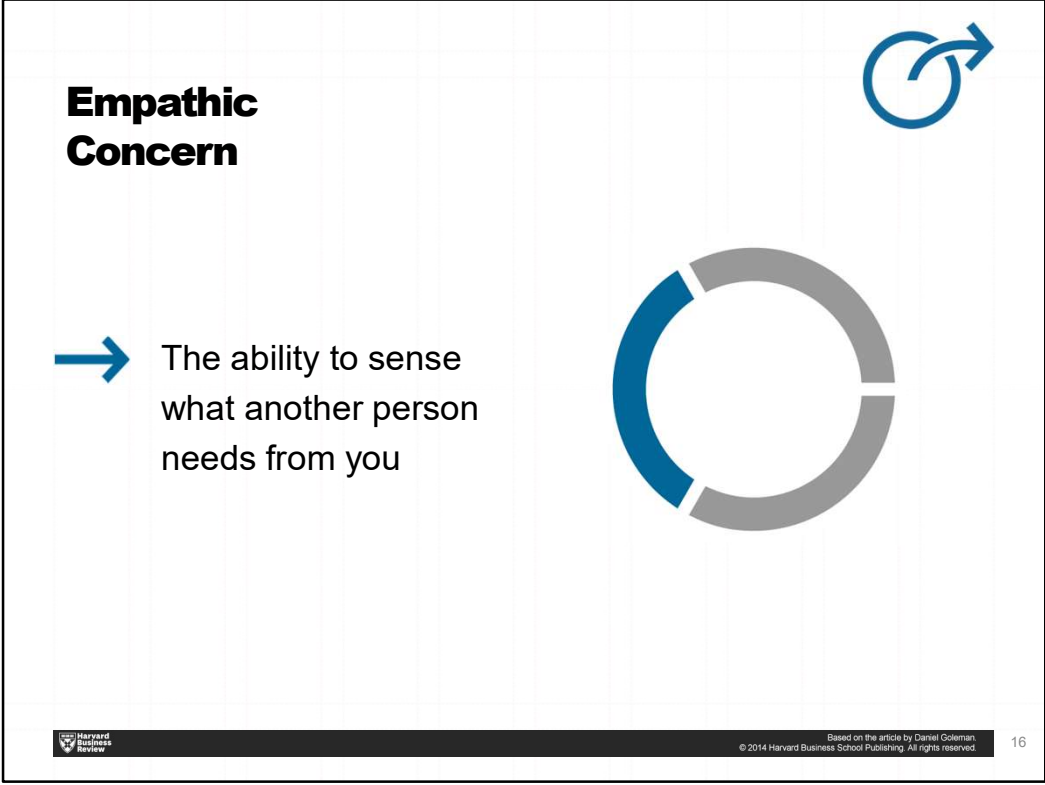
Emotional Empathy

→ The ability to feel what another person feels

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- Emotional empathy springs from the parts of the brain that allow us to feel fast without thinking deeply. They mirror others' emotional states within our own bodies.
- When I listen to you tell a gripping story, my brain patterns literally match up with yours. This kind of empathy is important for effective mentoring, managing clients, and reading group dynamics.
- You can tap into emotional empathy by deliberately focusing on your own internal echoes of someone else's feelings and maintaining an open awareness of that person's face, voice, and other external signs of emotion.
- You may also be able to prime emotional empathy by faking it. If you act in a caring way—looking people in the eye and paying attention to their expressions, even when you don't particularly want to—you may start to feel more engaged.



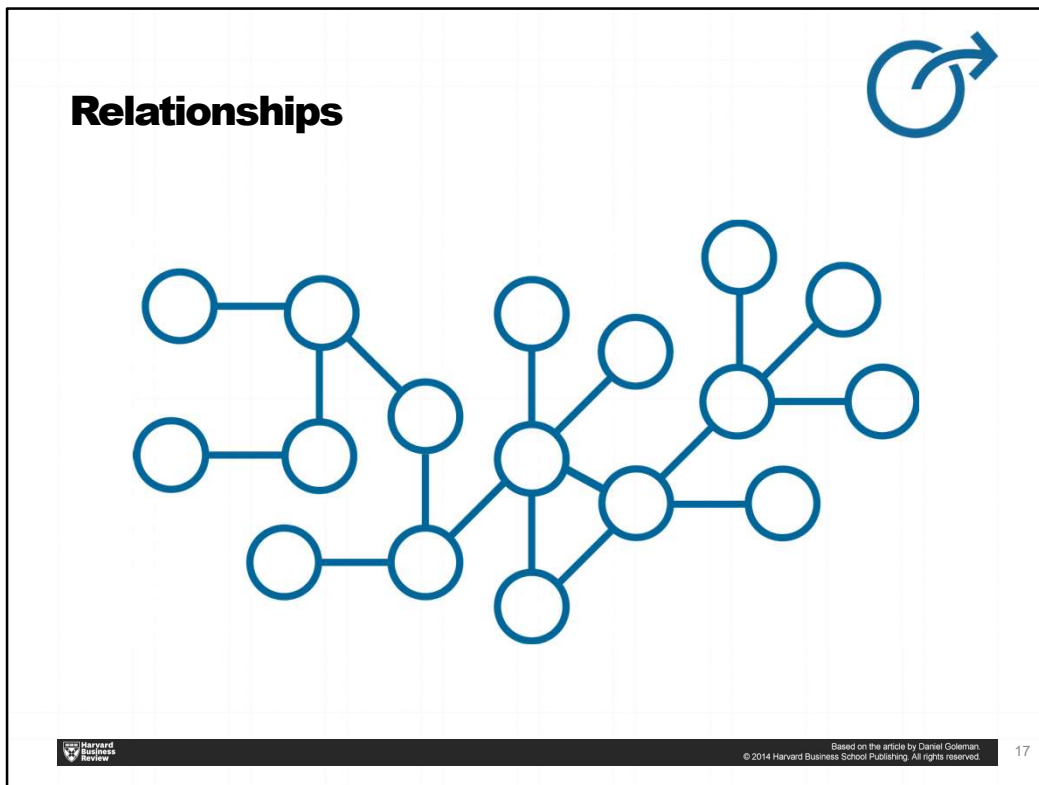
Empathic Concern

→ The ability to sense what another person needs from you

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- Empathic concern is closely related to emotional empathy. It's the ability to sense not just how people feel but also what they need from you.
- It's what you want in your doctor, your spouse—and your boss.
- Empathic concern is double-edged—you feel other people's distress intuitively and quickly, but then you deliberately weigh how much you value their well-being, because you don't want to be flooded by other people's emotions.
- It's a tricky balance. Sometimes you need to distance yourself from others in order to stay calm and help them.
- The more distracted you are, the less you can cultivate the subtler forms of empathy and compassion.



- Executives who excel at building relationships and influencing people can intuitively read social context, pick up on implicit norms, and behave in ways that put others at ease.
- That ability is connected neurologically to the ability to map personal connections in your organization—and know whose opinions matter.
- Alarming, research suggests that as people gain power, their ability to perceive and maintain personal connections tends to suffer. One study found that leaders consistently focus their gaze less on lower-ranking people and are more likely to interrupt or to monopolize the conversation.
- Researchers also see this play out over e-mail. The longer it takes Person A to respond to Person B, the more relative power Person A has. Map response times across an entire organization, and you'll get a remarkably accurate chart of social standing. The boss leaves e-mails unanswered for hours; those lower down respond within minutes

Focus on the Wider World

Explorative
strategic thinking
Creative thinking



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- Leaders with a strong outward focus are able to exercise these two skills.
- They tend to be visionaries who sense the far-flung consequences of local decisions and imagine how the choices they make today will play out in the future.
- Take Bill Gates: On *60 Minutes*, Melinda Gates remarked that Bill was the type of person who would read an entire book on fertilizer. “Why fertilizer?” Charlie Rose wanted to know. The connection was obvious to Bill Gates, who is constantly looking for technological advances that can save lives on a massive scale: “A few billion people would have to die if we hadn’t come up with fertilizer.”



Explorative Strategic Thinking

Pursuing fresh paths
Spotting new opportunities

The graphic features a central cluster of three interlocking arrows in green, orange, and blue, each with a circular loop at its tail. In the top right corner, there is an orange icon of a stylized 'M' with two arrows pointing outwards from its top. At the bottom left, the Harvard Business Review logo is visible. At the bottom right, there is a small text box containing the text: 'Based on the article by Daniel Goleman. © 2014 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.' and the number '19'.

- Any business school course on strategy will give you the two main elements: exploiting your current advantage and exploring for new ones.
- It's not surprising to find that exploitation requires concentration on the job at hand, whereas exploration demands open awareness to recognize new possibilities. But exploitation is connected to the brain's reward circuitry—in other words, it feels good to coast along in a familiar routine.
- So when you switch to exploration to roam widely and pursue fresh paths, you have to make a deliberate cognitive effort to disengage from that routine and maintain open awareness.



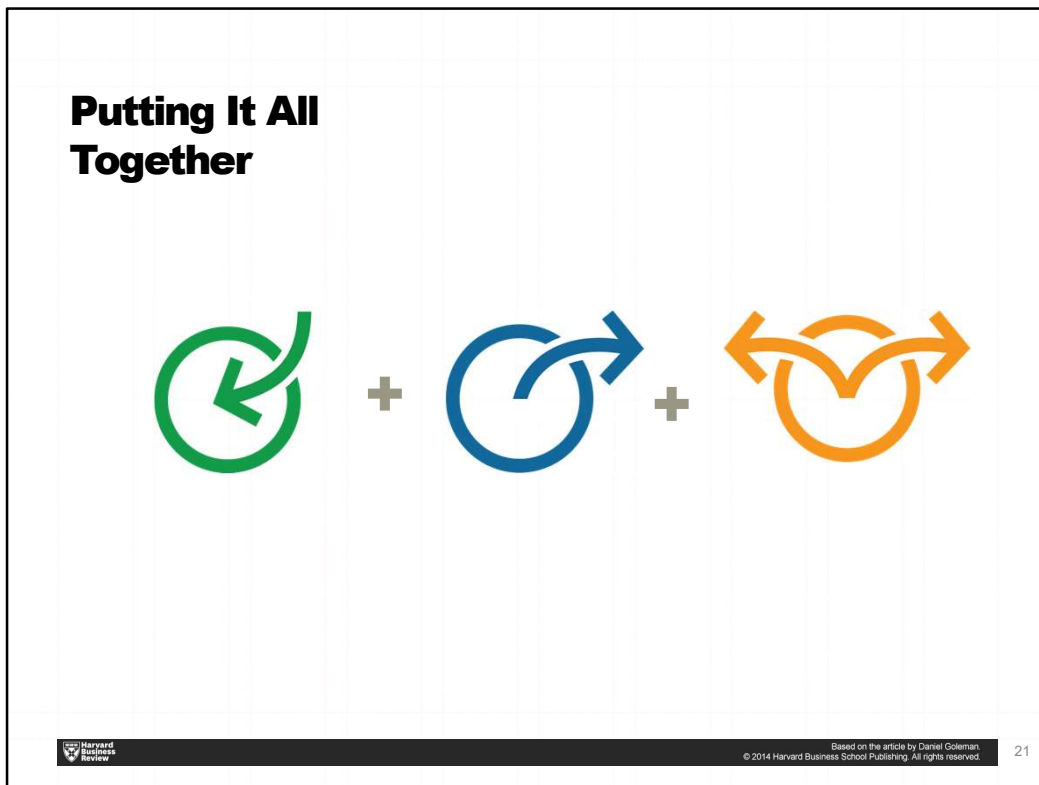
The diagram is contained within a black rectangular border. In the top right corner, there is an orange icon of a stylized bird or 'M' shape with two arrows pointing outwards. On the left side, the text 'Creative Thinking' is written in bold black font. Below it, the words 'Vigilance', 'Selective attention', and 'Open awareness' are listed in a regular black font. To the right of this text is a large green icon consisting of a central cross with four arrows pointing outwards, all enclosed within a circular border.

Creative Thinking

Vigilance
Selective attention
Open awareness

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- Thinking creatively involves three forms of focus:
 - Vigilance—remaining alert for relevant information while immersing yourself in all kinds of input
 - Selective attention—focusing on one thing while filtering out everything else
 - Open awareness, which we’ve discussed earlier
- The classic model of creative thinking shows how you use each of these.
 - First you use vigilance to gather a wide variety of pertinent information.
 - Then you alternate between intense concentration on the problem at hand (selective attention) and letting your mind wander freely, as you might in the shower or going out for a run (open awareness).



- Being a focused leader doesn't merely mean concentrating on the biggest priorities of the year or being in tune with corporate culture.
- It means commanding the full range of your own attention.
- With diligence, you can cultivate focus on yourself, on others, and on the wider world.
- As a result, you'll be able to direct your attention—and others' attention—where you need it.

Further Reading

Harvard Business Review Articles

[What Makes a Leader?](#)

Daniel Goleman

[Leadership That Gets Results](#)

Daniel Goleman

[Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?](#)

Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones

[Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve](#)

Jim Collins

[Understanding Leadership](#)

W.C.H. Prentice

Harvard Business Review Press Books

[Shine: Using Brain Science to Get the Best from Your People](#)

Edward M. Hallowell

[Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence](#)

With a New Preface by the Authors

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee

Harvard Business Review Video

[The Path to Peak Performance](#)

Ned Hallowell