

“Foxes and Hedgehogs”



- A dichotomy that is meant to evaluate two perspectives consistent with character and cognitive styles of individuals in positions of authority within organizations
- Two opposing world views that may be useful in thinking about human nature (Zaleznik 2008)
- Classified along a spectrum between hedgehogs and foxes (*from Isaiah Berlin essay on Leo Tolstoy*)

“The fox knows many little things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

-- Archilochus

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How Foxes Think

Multidisciplinary –

Finding a diversity of perspectives. Looking outside of their comfort zone to whatever different methods might work better than the current ones.

Adaptable –

Change is the Only Constant. When something works, it could work better differently, when something doesn't work then a new method might work better.

How Hedgehogs Think

Specialized -

Loyal to their current data and skills. They focus on how things they know they can do may be used instead of learning new skills that might be better suited to a new environment.

Inflexible–

They stick with “The way it’s always been.” Change for when necessary or forced, and only as a way to refine the status quo for now, not create a new approach for each new problem.

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How Foxes Think	How Hedgehogs Think
<p><u>Self-critical</u> – Constantly evaluating themselves and open to criticism. Learning about where they failed gives them a chance to transform and improve.</p>	<p><u>Stubborn</u> – Their mistakes are blamed on bad luck or on peculiar circumstances. (“A good model had a bad day.”) A prisoner of their own experience or ideology.</p>
<p><u>Tolerant of complexity</u> – They are aware that they don’t know all the variables, and they may never know them all. They know that one solution will not fit all problems and some problems have multiple sources that need different solutions.</p>	<p><u>Order-seeking</u> – They believe every problem has a clearly defined solution. One system can be shoehorned to fit any environment and that variables and complications are bound to have some uniformity between them.</p>

How Foxes Think	How Hedgehogs Think
<p><u>Cautious</u> – They never think “yes or no”, but instead “It depends.” They are constantly changing their outlook based on new information and context.</p>	<p><u>Confident</u> – They rarely hedge their predictions and are reluctant to change their minds or outlooks. Often, look for confirmation instead of refutation.</p>
<p><u>Empirical</u> – They rely on research and objective observations not on the expectation, but on “what we know right now suggests.” They see the trees, then decide if it’s a park or a forest.</p>	<p><u>Anecdotal</u> – They are Fixed to their beliefs. They expect that if something doesn’t fit their expectations that they just don’t have the full picture yet. They look for the forest when they see a tree.</p>

Caveats: Foxes and Hedgehogs

- **Are subject to the richness of the context and the dynamics of complexity in any given issue**
- **Are on a spectrum (where it may be prudent to be foxy about somethings and hedgehog-ish about other things)**
- **Neither are necessary good or bad overall, awareness and application are the key concept**
- **They are essential keys to maneuvering in, and navigating through the evaluation of any issue**
- **Objectivity and accuracy are the ends, and more often than not, Foxes are better decision makers**