

# Critical Thinking & Strategic Thinking

Senior Security Studies Program  
Strategic Studies Center

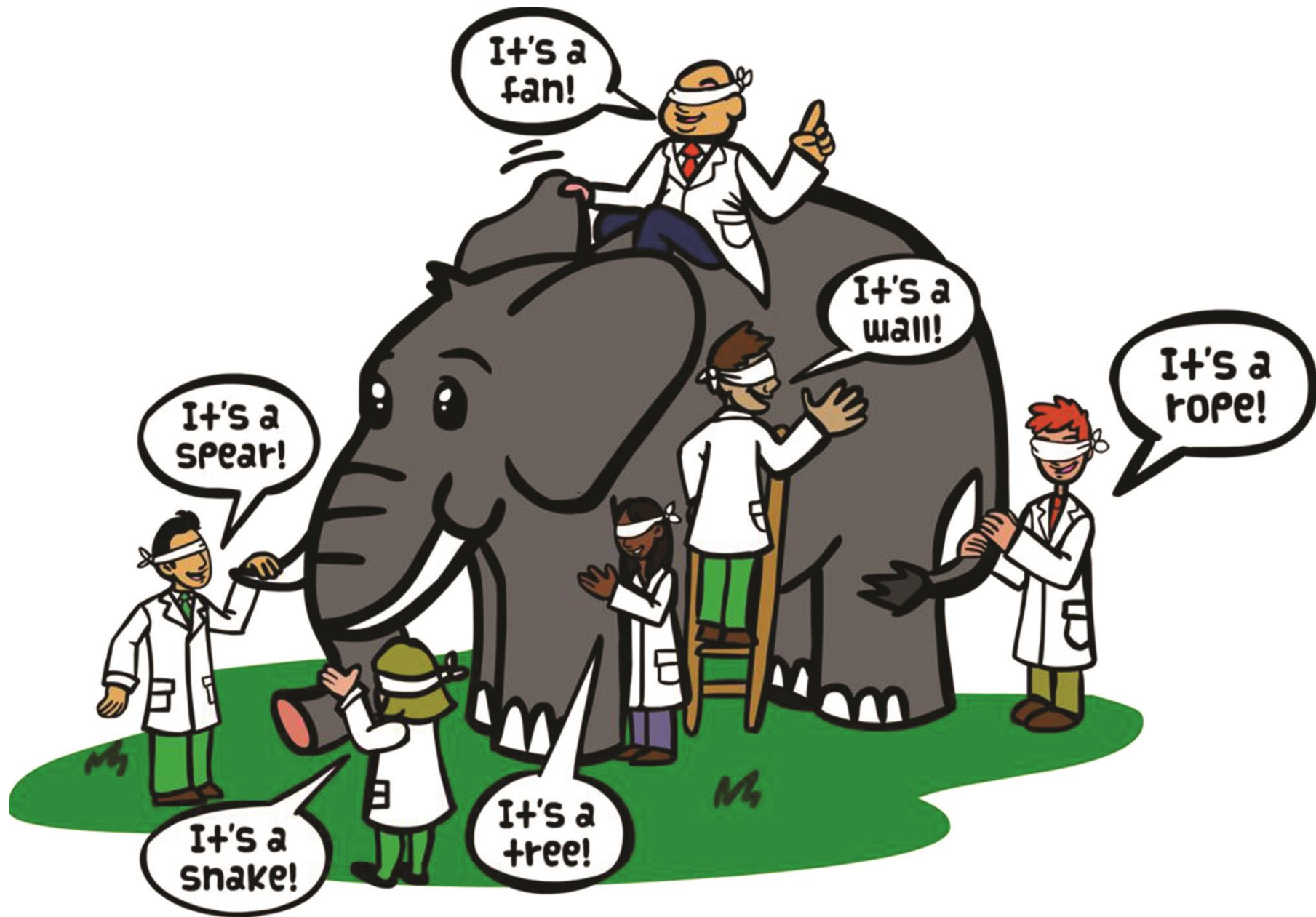
Dr. Alexander Vuving

DKI APCSS

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It's a fan!

It's a wall!

It's a rope!

It's a spear!

It's a snake!

It's a tree!

SUCCESS

FAILURE



COOPERATION

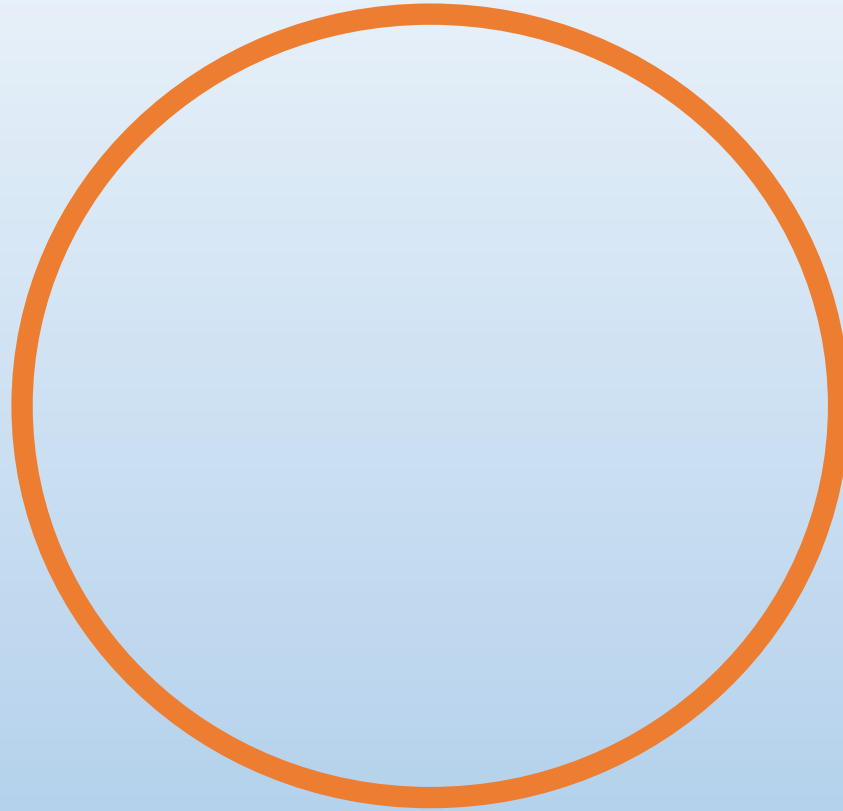
COMPETITION

SUCCESS

FAILURE

COOPERATION

COMPETITION



All knowledge is about the **PAST**

All our decisions are about the **FUTURE**



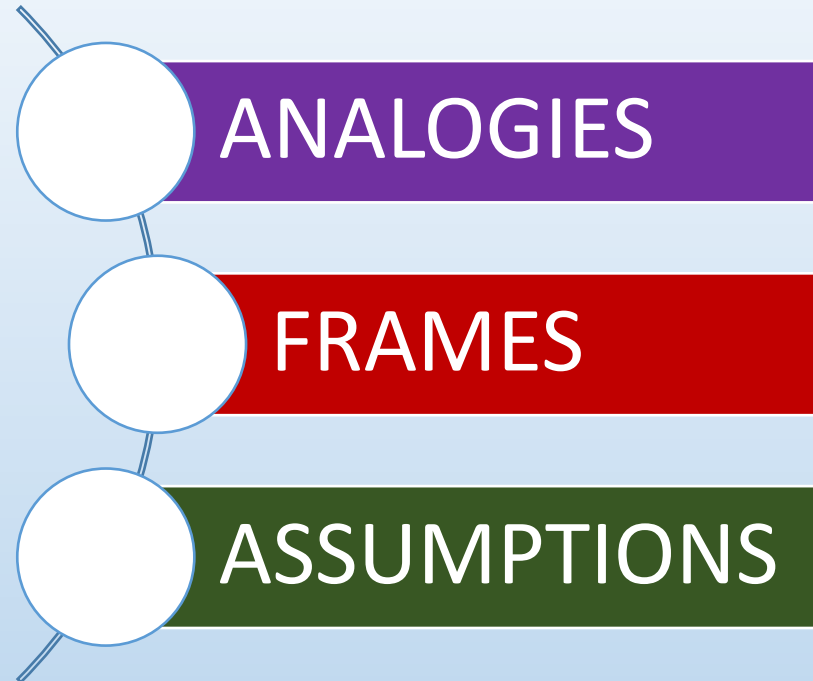
**The PRESENT**  
was once a future  
of the past

How do we step into the future?

We rely on our imagination

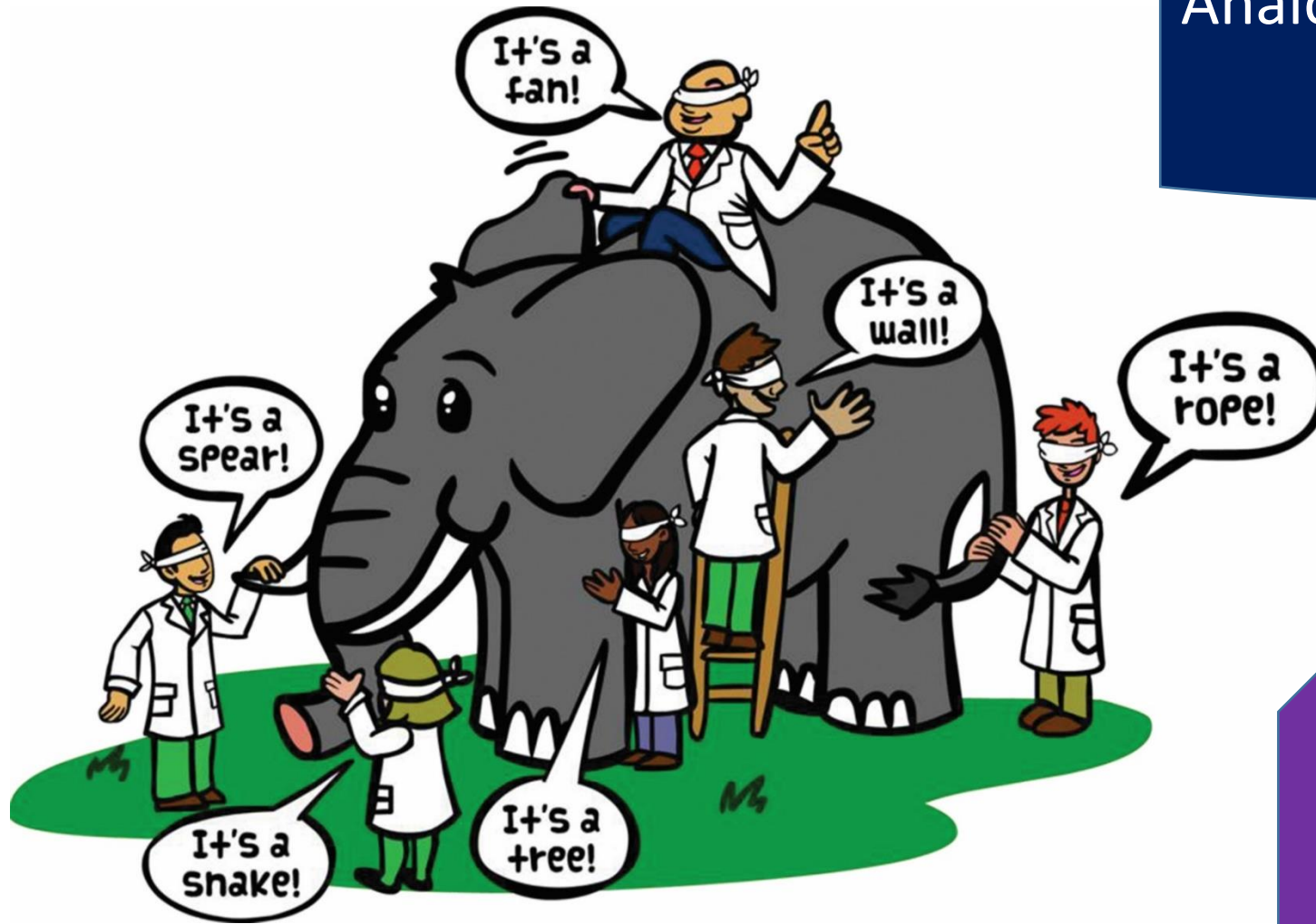
Which ultimately relies on lessons from the past.

**Beware of**



They are necessary for our thinking. But they both enable and constrain our thinking.

Analogy is the core of cognition,  
the motor of thought.



Every picture has  
a frame – even  
the big picture.

All views are wrong,  
but some views may  
be useful for some  
purposes.



A camera

Fish

It looks like ...



It works like ...

A computer

A mammal



# Critical Thinking Tools

- SWOT Analysis
- Debate: Pros + Cons
- Red Teaming
- Illeism
- Questioning Your Assumptions
- Argument Mapping
- Facts vs Opinions
- The Six Thinking Hats

# SWOT Analysis



# Debate the Pros and Cons



# Red Teaming

- The practice of rigorously challenging your plans, policies, systems, and assumptions by adopting an adversarial approach.



Put yourself in the shoes  
of your enemy

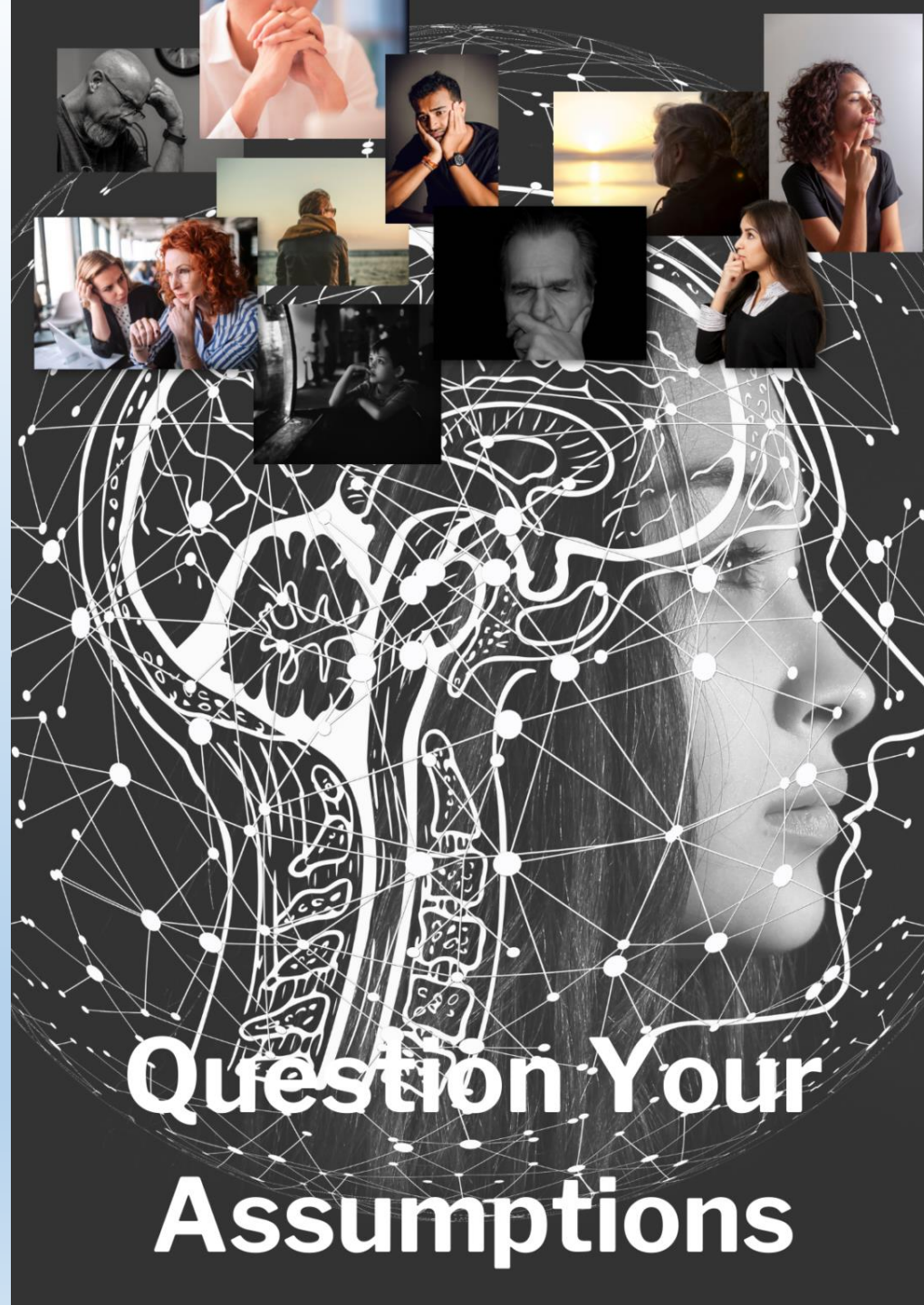


# Illeism



- Talking about yourself, your own plans, etc. from a **third-person perspective**

Every idea is based on some assumptions. (This one included.)

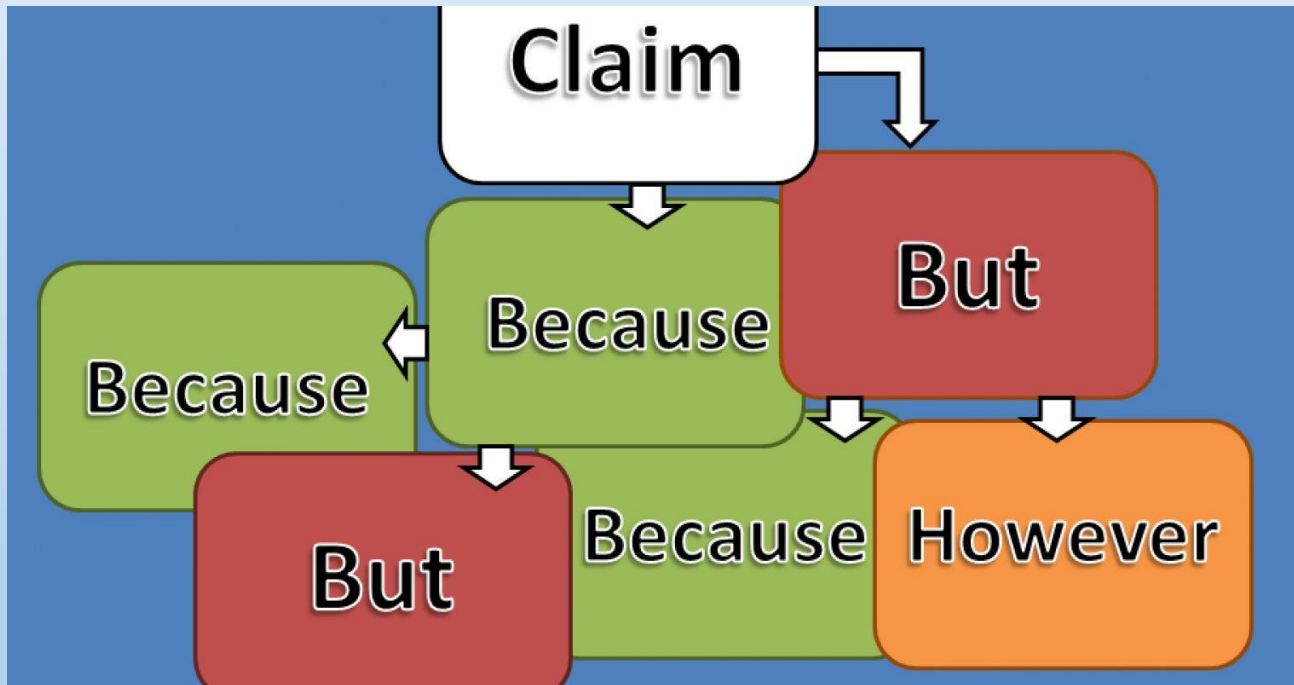


Assumptions are the conditions for the possibility of your arguments.

Questions:

- What are your underlying assumptions?
- Which assumptions may be changed?
- What if an assumption is changed?

# Argument Mapping



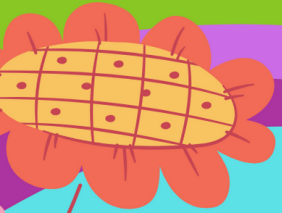
Visual representation of the structure of an argument, using diagrams that show the

- Premises (assumptions),
- Conclusion,
- Reasoning (inference), incl.
  - Claims,
  - Evidence,
  - Concepts, and
  - Objections.



# FACTS

*Tell us what happened  
and can be proven  
true or false.*



# OPINIONS

*Are attitudes or  
judgements that can't  
be proven right or wrong.*

Enemies of Clear Thinking

## Facts vs. Opinions

### Wishful Thinker

There is no such thing as facts, just beliefs.

My opinion is a fact.

### Critical Thinker

Facts are not opinions.

Facts are the same for everyone.



# Edward de Bono Six Thinking Hats®

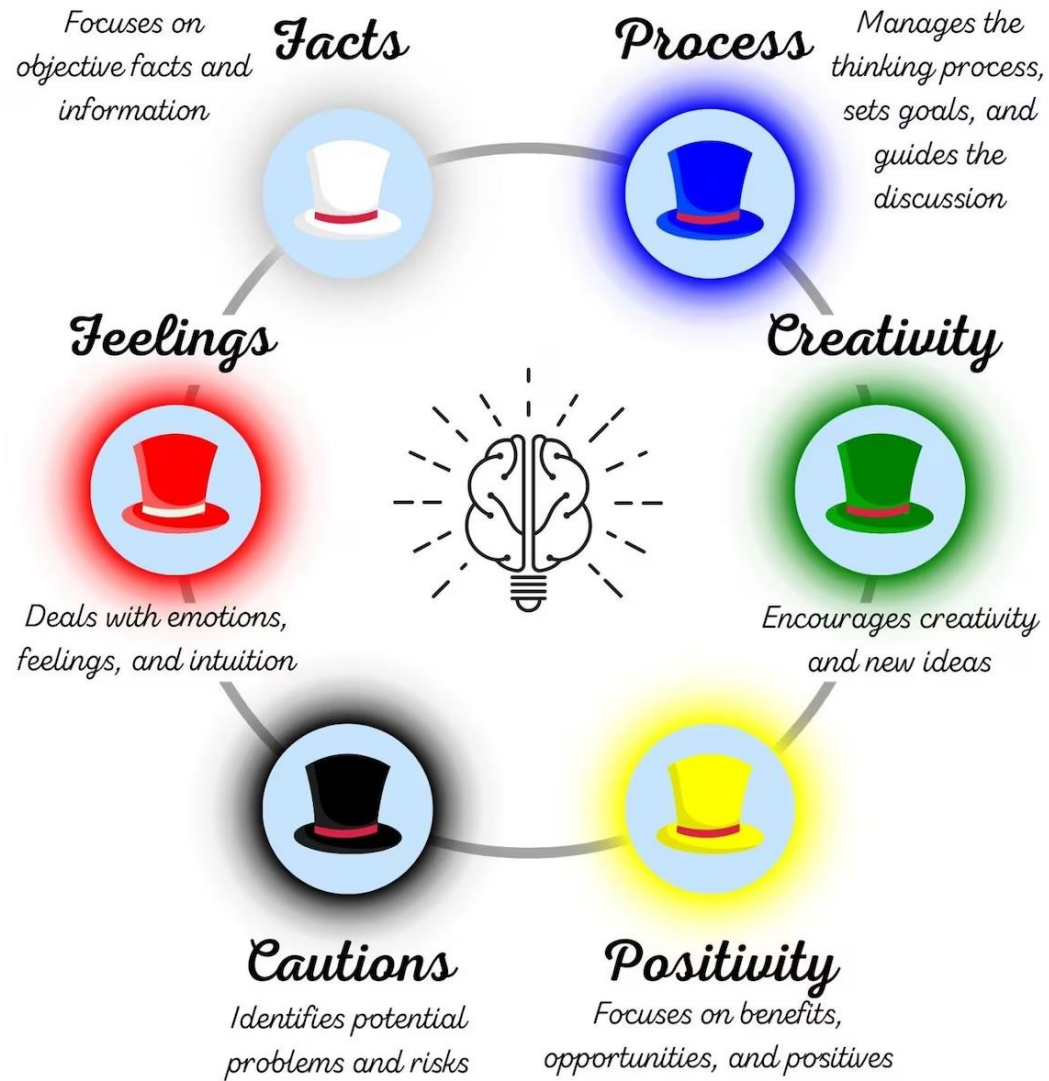


"We owe de Bono a debt for constantly reminding us that thinking is a skill and can be improved." Psychology Today

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER  
REVISED AND UPDATED



## Six Thinking Hats



# What Is Strategic Thinking? (1)

<b>TACTICAL THINKING</b>	<b>STRATEGIC THINKING</b>
Doing Things Right	Doing the Right Things
Short-term Actions	Long-term Vision
Seeing the Trees	Seeing the Forest
Focusing on the Plan	Scanning the Horizon for Future Trends
Thinking Sequentially	Thinking Holistically
Precise Decision-making	Agile Decision-making

# What Is Strategic Thinking? (2)

<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	<b>STRATEGIC THINKING</b>
Blueprint	Direction
How	What & When
Gives Voice, Action, Structure	Informs
Analysis of Data	Synthesis of Data

# Strategy Is Not a Plan, Not Even a Master Plan

Strategy is a Process,  
a Framework, and an  
Ecosystem

No plan survives first  
contact with the enemy.  
(Helmuth von Moltke)

“The best generals are  
those who arrive at the  
results of planning without  
being tied to plans.”  
(Winston Churchill)



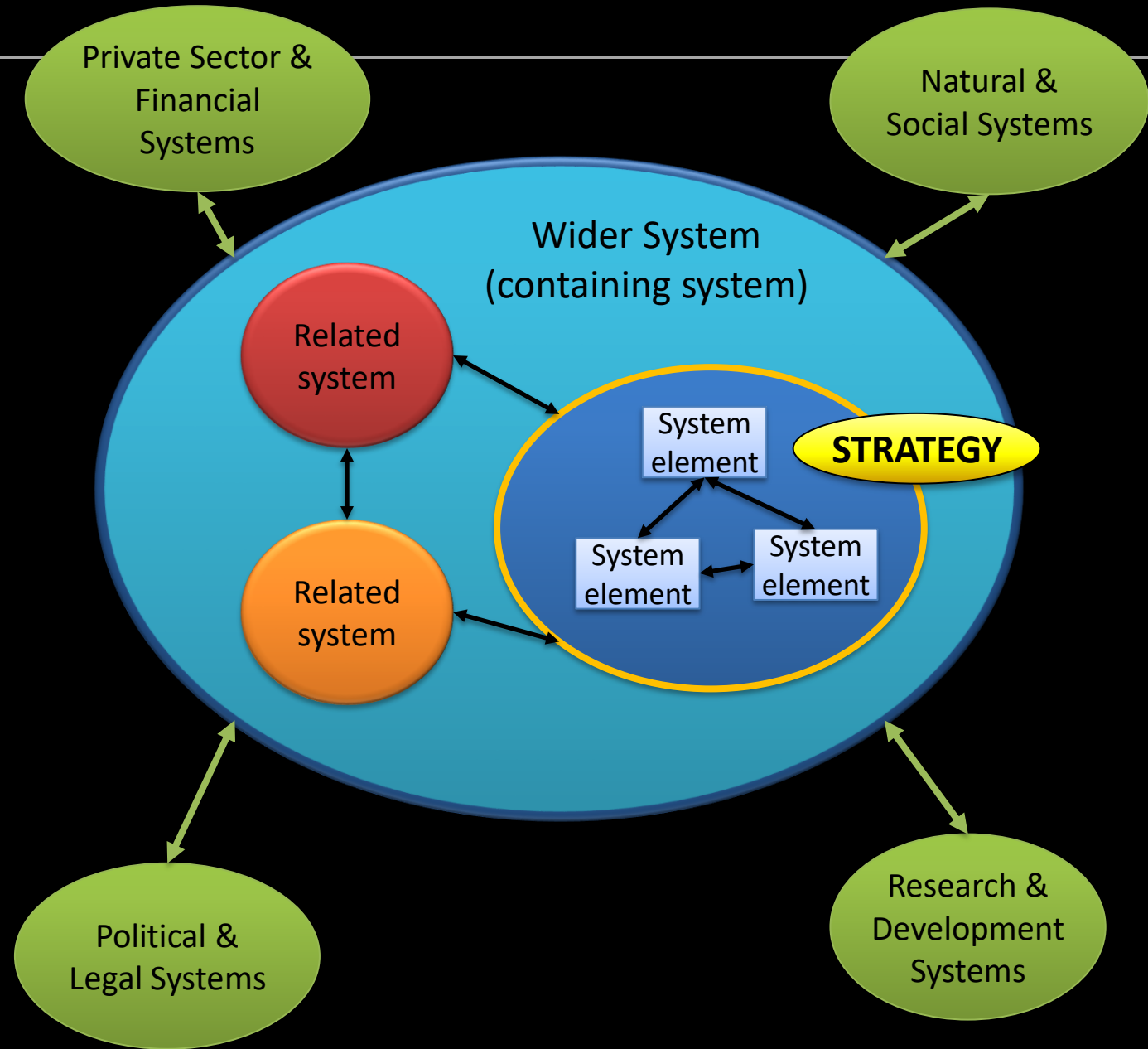
Strategy is

The process of maintaining a balance between **ends, ways, and means**.

The framework that provides a coherent view of the world and a **logic for making choices** and prioritizing.

# Strategy as an Ecosystem

- Strategy creates its own ecosystem: Its team, allies, partners, stakeholders, etc.
- Strategy operates within other systems and must behave accordingly by adapting to them.



# The VUCA world



**V**olatile: change goes up and down affecting dimensions of life

**U**ncertain: hard to predict outcomes

**C**omplex: multiple driving forces affecting each other – no single root cause

**A**mbiguous: lack of clear meaning



# In a VUCA environment:

Challenges may be **uncertain** and unknowable

No single 'root cause', just **key factors**

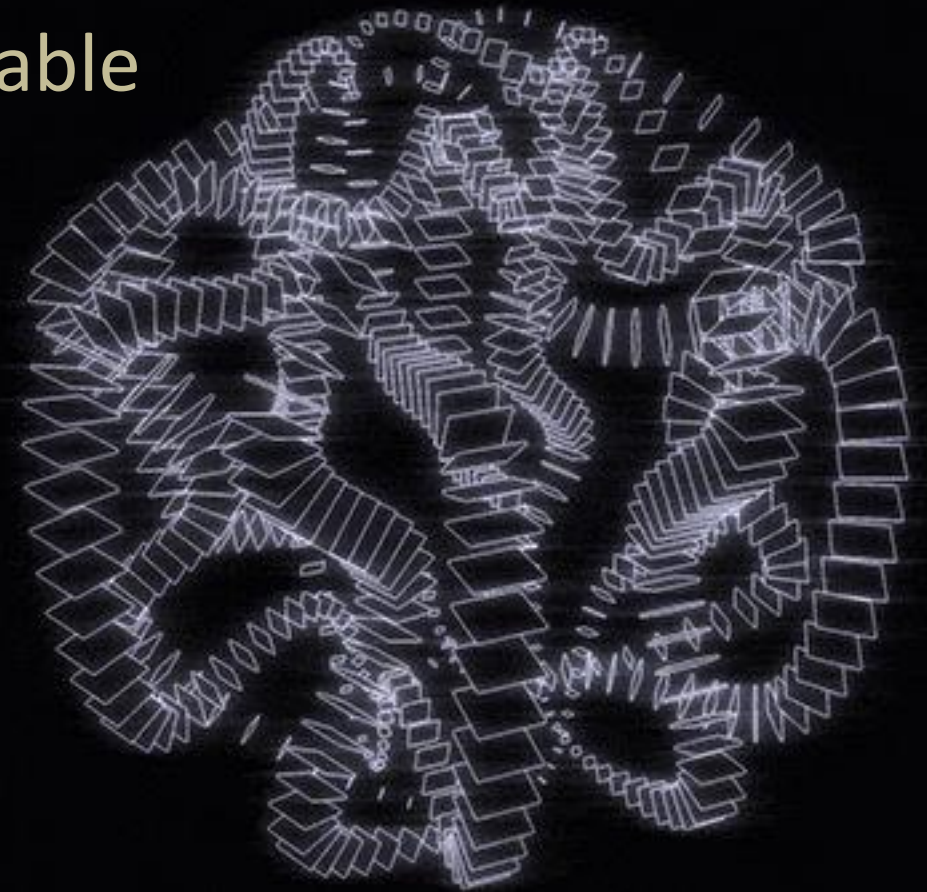
The **challenge** is part of the system

**You** are part of the system

Your **opposition** is part of the system

**Like it or not, we are all systems thinkers**

**It is better to be a good thinker than a bad one**





# Key Features of a VUCA Environment

- Open system → Dynamic → **Continual Change**
  - 1<sup>st</sup>-order, 2<sup>nd</sup>-order, 3<sup>rd</sup>-order, ..., n<sup>th</sup>-order effects → Non-linearity
- **Multi-mindedness** → Agency of the “weak” and the “small” also matters
  - People’ agency reflects their ambitions, historical experiences, and societal dynamics
- **Interdependence:**
  - Symmetric: Ties that bind
  - Asymmetric: Can be used as a leverage

# Strategic Thinking in a VUCA Environment

- The art of getting what you want, knowing that
  - others are also trying to get what they want,
  - the environment is continually changing, and
  - almost everything and everyone is interdependent.

A multidimensional mindset  
with 7 critical dimensions

# Key Dimensions of Strategic Thinking

- **Persist** with an ultimate end but be **flexible** in terms of the ways, means, and intermediate goals to achieve the end
- Always keep the **big picture** in mind
- Take the **long view**
- Embrace **systems** thinking
- Espouse **critical** thinking
- Be **creative**
- Be highly **adaptive**

# Case Study #1: China's strategy in SCS: The goal and its challenges

- **Goal** is to gain control of SCS
  - “Lost territories”, “national shame”
  - “First island chain”
  - Resources
- **Challenges:**
  - Stronger rival (US)
  - Large number of rivals
  - Main trade routes



# China's strategy in the SCS

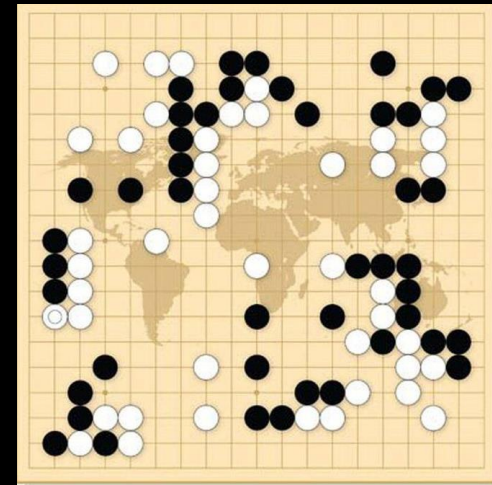


- **End:** Gain dominance/control of SCS
- **Ways:** Gradually **shift the propensity of things** (勢 *shi*) in favor of Chinese dominance through **opportunistic** and **“gray-zone” expansion** rather than major battles



圍棋 (*weiqi*, game of encirclement), fill in a vacuum, salami slicing, people's war at sea, “cabbage” (military, law enforcement, militia)

- **Means:** Everything can be weaponized (e.g., “three warfares”: media, psycho, law)





# Four Imperatives of PRC Strategy in SCS

1. **Avoid war.** Initiate clashes only to **exploit favorable circumstances.**
2. Control the most **strategically located territories.** Seize them stealthily if possible, in limited conflict if necessary.
3. Develop them into **hubs of logistics, forward and staging bases,** from which to dominate the waters and skies of the SCS.
4. Spread a **narrative** of China's **historical rights** in the SCS and China being **reactive** to, but **fearless** of, others' provocations.

# Case Study #2: Russian Invasion of Ukraine

*Assumptions underlying the war decision by Russia:*

- Ukrainian resistance will crumble under Russia's overwhelming force.
- Western responses will stay weak as in 2014 (when Russia annexed Crimea and intervened militarily in the Donbas).
- Russia's fait accompli will create a "new normal".

# But Reality Shows Otherwise

- Ukrainian resistance is very strong.
- Western responses are very strong.
- Russian fait accompli is impossible.
- The conflict may last for years, even decades.
- And the future of Russia is ...

# Some Lessons

- Don't underestimate the agency of the “weak” or “small”.
- Non-linearity (others' responses to your actions).
- Think about the higher-order effects of your action.
- Question your own beliefs & assumptions.
- Take the long view.
- Don't confuse your intermediate goals with the ultimate ends.

# How to Think Strategically

