

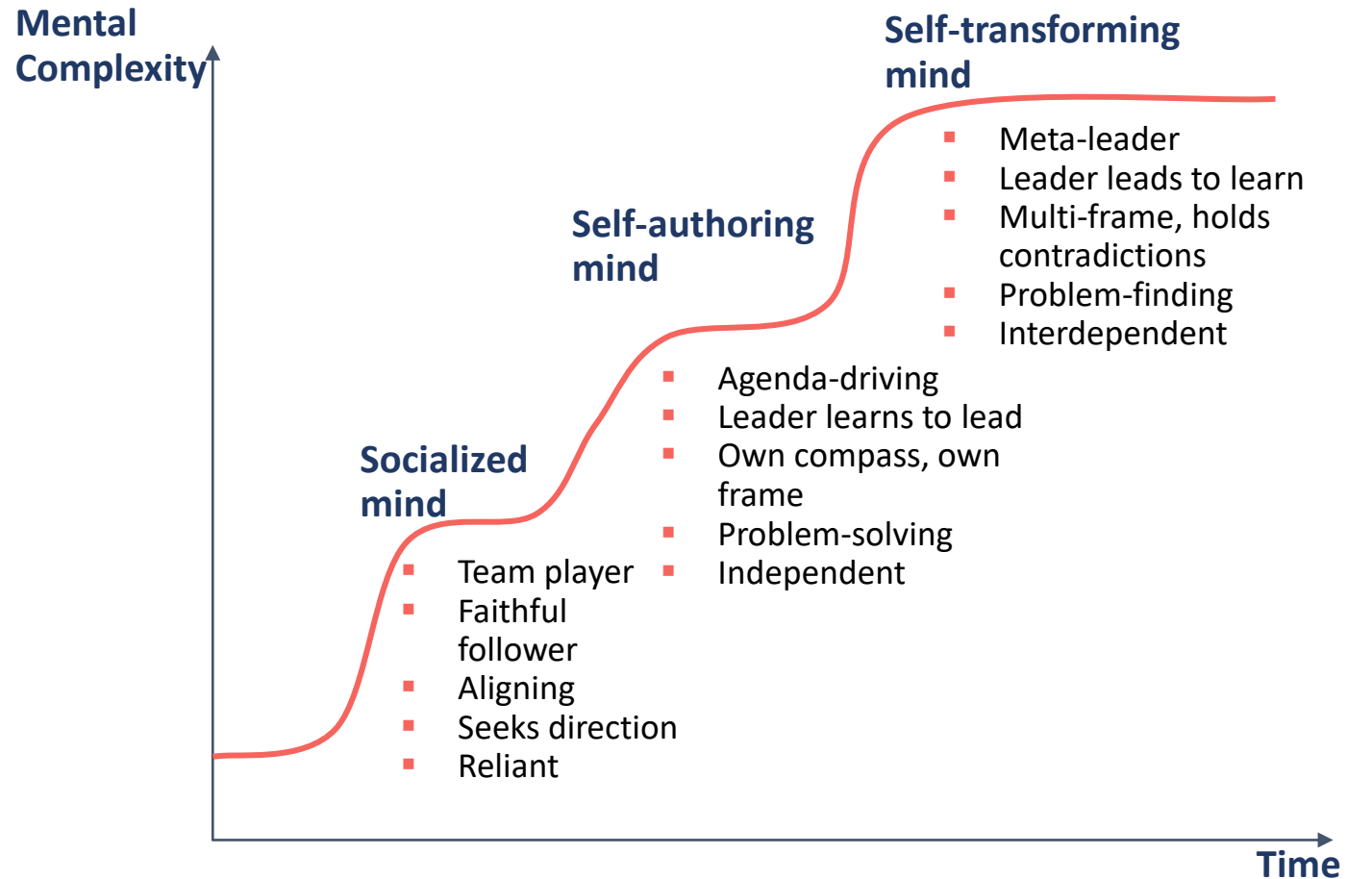
# Immunity to Change

## Understanding the Development of Mental Complexity

In his book, 'In Over our Heads' Kegan poses what he refers to as Constructive Development Theory, which explains that there are three qualitatively different plateaus in human development and mental complexity. They are:

- the socialized mind,
- the self-authoring mind, and
- the self-transforming mind— each of which, interprets the world in different ways.

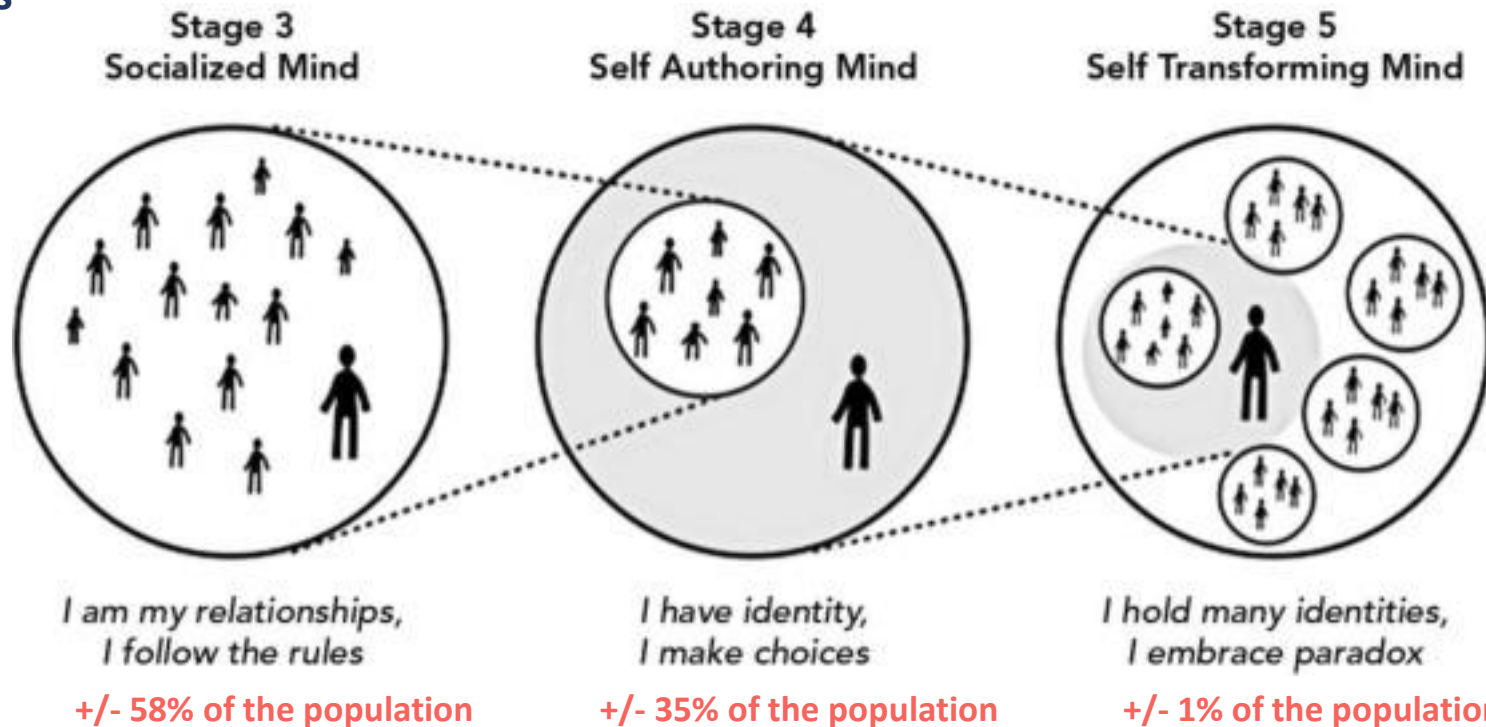
Each successive level of mental complexity is formally higher than the preceding one because it can perform the mental functions of the prior level as well as additional functions. Such that, the higher the mental plateau, the better the performance resulting in being able to better meet adaptive challenges both in life and the work context. In general the current levels of complexity of mind in adults, typically hover between the socialized mind and the self-authoring mind, and this is insufficient to meet the demands of today's complex world.



Source: Immunity to Change, Kegan, Laskow Lahey, Harvard Business Press 2009

# Immunity to Change

## Understanding the Development of Mental Complexity : The Three Most Relevant Stages



We can see that in order to solve for the challenges we face on the planet today, we need more people to evolve their level of mental complexity to the level of (or beyond) the self-authoring mind, as it is only then that we have the capability to devise and carry out adaptive solutions. In other words, individuals who are able to make choices about external expectations, take stands, set limits, and create boundaries to advance a mission or agenda.

The 64,000 dollar question is, how can we as individuals, and organisations and social structures who see that change is needed, accelerate the development of mental complexity in order to meet an complex change demands through adaptive means?

The first requirement is an adaptive formulation of the problem (i.e., how the problem runs up against the limits of an individual's mental complexity); the second is an adaptive solution (i.e., how the individual must adapt). In order to do this we need to understand this whole issue of Immunity to Change and how to transcend it.

# Immunity to Change

## The Three Phases of Complexity Explained

### The socialized mind

- We are shaped by the definitions and expectations of our personal environment
- Our self coheres by its alignment with, and loyalty to, that (e.g. the group) with which it identifies
- This can express itself primarily in our relationships with people, with “schools of thought” (our ideas and beliefs) or both and makes sense of information and communicates in relation to these loyalties.

### The self-authoring mind

- We are able to step back enough from the social environment to generate an internal “seat of judgment” or personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations, as distinct from the social environment
- People create and share information that is likely to advance their own agenda, and filter out information that doesn't have direct relevance to their own agenda.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with its own belief system/ideology/personal code; by its ability to self-direct, take stands, set limits, and create and regulate its boundaries in behalf of its own voice

### The self-transforming mind

- We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own limits, ideology or personal authority; see that any one system or self-organization is in some way partial or incomplete; be friendlier towards contradiction and opposites; seek to hold on to multiple systems rather than projecting all but one onto the other
- People not only make progress in advancing their own agenda and design, but are also open to and able to make modifications to it
- Our self coheres through the ability not to confuse internal consistency with wholeness or completeness, and through its alignment with the dielectric rather than either pole
- People are able to prioritise information that may reveal limits to their current design or frame

# Immunity to Change

## Uncovering Immunity

To understand how a change imperative, problem or challenge brings an individual to the limitations of his or her mental growth, the process of “immunity mapping” is used in order to help people discover not just how things are at the moment, but also why they are this way, and what will need to change in order to bring about any significant new results. This mapping process identifies the root causes of the underlying competing commitments that prevent people from achieving their goals. Until these competing commitments have been brought to the surface, individuals will continue— in vain—to apply technical approaches (e.g. plans or strategies for eliminating obstructive behaviours and/or mindsets ) to try and solve adaptive problems. The end result of the mapping process is a clear view of an individual’s “immunity to change.” And once that is done, then real progress can be made.

The use of the medical metaphor of immunity highlights the duality of an individual’s resistance to change. On the one hand, having immunity in the body, is usually a source of strength, however, it can also threaten an individual’s health by rejecting information that the body may need to heal itself or in order to thrive. This process is applicable for both individual and also collective immunities to change. And it is important to distinguish the difference between technical and adaptive change. Ron Heifetz in his book ‘Leadership without Easy Answers’ makes the discernment that technical challenges require a specific, well-known skill set, where-as adaptive challenges can only be met by applying a more sophisticated mental state. And the biggest error we can make is to try and use a technical means to solve for adaptive challenges.

### Preconditions of an “Optimal Conflict”



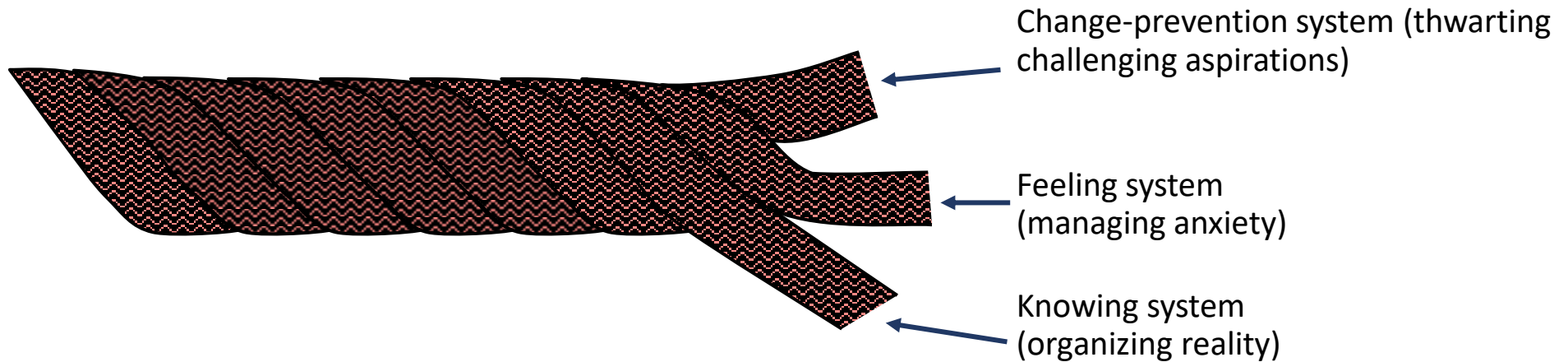
- The persistent experience of some frustration, dilemma, life puzzle, quandary or personal problem that is .....
- Perfectly designed to cause us to feel the limits of our current way of knowing
- In some sphere of our living that we care about with ..
- Sufficient supports so that we are neither overwhelmed by the conflict nor able to escape or diffuse it

### Can Lead to ...

- An increase in mental complexity

# Immunity to Change

## Three Dimensions of Immunity to Change



Resistance to change does not necessarily reflect opposition, nor is it merely a result of inertia. Instead, even as individuals hold a sincere commitment to change, many people are unwittingly applying productive energy toward a hidden **competing commitment**. The resulting dynamic equilibrium stalls the effort in what looks like resistance but is in fact this personal immunity to change. When you uncover the competing commitment, behaviour that seemed irrational and ineffective suddenly becomes logical and even sensible but unfortunately, counters the achievement goal that is trying to be achieved.

## Working through Immunity to Change Identification

As a Mentor, you must guide your Mentee through this exercise with understanding and sensitivity. If s/he is to engage in honest introspection and candid disclosure, they must understand that their revelations won't be judged, or downplayed but taken seriously. The goal of this exploration is solely to help them become more effective, not to find flaws in their approach or their character. As you support your Mentee to unearth and challenge their innermost assumptions, you may at times feel you're playing the role of a psychologist. But in a sense, it is really just about helping the Mentee overcome their limitations and become more successful at achieving the outcomes and goals they have set themselves.

Competing commitments cause people to behave in ways that seem inexplicable and irremediable, and this is enormously frustrating often to themselves, and certainly to others who are looking for them to change. People with the most sincere intentions often unwittingly create for themselves Herculean tasks, and they are tremendously relieved when they discover just why they feel as if they are rolling a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down again. Whilst uncovering a competing commitment can also open up a Pandora's box of issues and concerns, the discovery does provide insight and clarity and offers hope for finally accomplishing the primary, stated commitment.

# Immunity to Change

## Steps in the Process

As a Mentor, you will in this process guide the Mentee through a set of questions that are designed to uncover any competing commitments that may be active. Following that the Mentee will reflect upon these competing commitments in order to ascertain underlying assumptions that sit at their heart. Then and only then can the Mentee start the process of shifting their behaviour – based now from knowledge and understanding.

This process isn't a quick fix. So as a Mentor you and also your Mentee need to be willing to put in the necessary time for a meaningful outcome to be reached. Each step takes time, because the Mentee will need to reflect on each question and the implications of their answers. The process of identifying and then challenging competing commitments and making real progress toward overcoming an immunity to change will unfold over a longer period-weeks or even months. This is because they are out of consciousness and were in fact established with due cause in the past. And they may be deeply engrained habits or mindsets that get uncovered. That said, even getting them on the table can impact the decisions people make and the actions they take in positive manner.

- Clarify the Goal/Commitment that is wanting to be enacted, and what it implies – given it is not working
- What is the Mentee doing or not doing that is hindering action being taken to bring the commitment to life
- Identify the consequence of doing the opposite of the actual behaviour that is happening – what comes up?
- Identify the competing commitment by examining the actual outcome that is being avoided by continuing to do what is currently being done
- Going one level deeper into the iceberg and identify the big assumption that underpins the continuation of the behaviour and the inability to enact on what is needed to bring the goal/commitment into being
- Explore and question the big assumption through examining consequences of holding this assumption (often referred to as a paradigm, worldview or mindset); look for evidence to the contrary that casts doubt on the validity of the assumption – what else might also be true or plausible? ; explore the biography of the assumption – how it arose; test the assumption and how this particular map no longer matches the territory; evaluate the results. (NOTE : It is important to realise – that testing a big assumption wont necessarily show it up to be false. Even if there is truth in the assumption, knowing about it and exploring it frees people up to find other ways to operate, once they are clear on the hold the assumption has on their ability to shift, change and achieve the goals they set themselves)

# Immunity to Change

## Example of a Completed Immunity to Change Grid (Individual Version)

1.Improvement Goal/Commitment	2. Behaviours I'm Doing/Not Doing	3. Hidden Competing Commitments	4. Big Assumptions
<p>Be more <b>OPEN</b> and <b>TRANSPARENT</b> ....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listen without interrupting</li> <li>▪ Invite others input, even when I feel their ideas might make me uncomfortable</li> <li>▪ Share my own thinking process and ideas without withholding</li> <li>▪ Be transparent about why and how I make the decisions I do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tracking my internal dialogue and not being fully present to what is being said by others</li> <li>▪ Shutting down others by saying things like “We can’t do that” or “It’s already been decided”</li> <li>▪ Being defensive both in my tone and body language – throwing arms up in frustration, crossing my arms and legs, raising my voice and speaking over others</li> <li>▪ Staying quiet when I haven’t made up my mind as to my final decision or when I don’t feel that what I want to say will add value or be accepted</li> <li>▪ Not sharing how I came to a decision – just instructing “Do it”</li> <li>▪ Not asking others opinions before deciding</li> <li>▪ Sitting back and “checking out”</li> </ul>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>Worry Box</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I will look stupid / not have the answers</li> <li>▪ People will laugh at me</li> <li>▪ I may lose my job</li> <li>▪ Others may disagree with me</li> </ul> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I am committed to having all the answers because I am the boss and its expected of me to be in control and sure of myself</li> <li>▪ I am committed to not being mocked or disrespected</li> <li>▪ I need to feel safe, and not risk my career progression, or my job</li> <li>▪ I am committed to ensure that others fall in line and that they don’t speak against my point of view</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I will look like I don’t deserve to be the boss if I share embryonic ideas or think out loud – it will look like I’m not competent</li> <li>▪ I will be seen as laughable if I speak about my musings rather than stating my decisions</li> <li>▪ What I think and how I get to my decisions are of little interest nor value to others – they just want to know what to do</li> <li>▪ My career advancement and job is not safe if I am not seen to be in control</li> <li>▪ If I open things up to discussion – I may have to say yes to things I don’t want to do</li> <li>▪ I don’t have support and people will be even more against me</li> <li>▪ I must always be right</li> </ul>

# Immunity to Change

## Immunity to Change Grid

1. Improvement Goal/Commitment	2. Behavioiurs I'm Doing/Not Doing	3. Hidden Competing Commitments	4. Big Assumptions
		<div data-bbox="1052 332 1502 753"><p>Worry Box</p></div>	



# Immunity to Change

## Instructions to Complete the Immunity to Change Grid

1. Improvement Goal/Commitment	2. Behaviours I'm Doing/Not Doing	3. Hidden Competing Commitments	4. Big Assumptions
<p>Choose a goal that would make a real difference. One you truly want to achieve. (Ask yourself – or others; ‘what is the single most powerful change I could make to improve my life – ( work, performance, relationships, finances etc.) right now.</p> <p>Write this here and check with others that it is the best thing to do.</p> <p>Specify the concrete behaviours that are needed in order to achieve this goal.</p> <p>Write them as positive statements (eg. delegate’ rather than ‘stop doing all the work myself’)</p>	<p>Ask yourself from the perspective of an imagined observer, (balcony): What are the things you do, or don’t do that get in the way of the stated goal.</p> <p>Brainstorm without judgment and name the concrete things – only the poor or non-supportive behaviours. Take stock of the things you actually do instead of those things that would create positive change for you.</p> <p>Do NOT seek to find out WHY nor look for justifications or rationalisations, no explanations.</p> <p>Just notice and list the obstructionist behaviours – define the actions (what can be seen) rather than your feelings</p>	<p><b>Worry Box</b> Your fears go into the worry box. This can often be a confronting step – acknowledging this to yourself, so be courageous.</p> <p>These point to your competing commitments, which you will list below the worry box. Pick concerns that are specific and loathsome e.g. I will fail, I will lose my client’s trust rather than generic statements such as ‘boredom’ or ‘impatience’.</p> <p>Turn the contents of the worry box into commitments (that are competing against the goal and its attendant behaviours). Writing these and scan across the three columns.</p> <p>Notice how you have one foot on the accelerator (1), one on the brake (3). this is the immune system ‘protecting you’ from feared outcomes.</p>	<p>Big Assumptions are beliefs and internalised truths we hold about how the world works, how we work, and how people respond to us. They are assumptions that make each hidden commitment feel necessary.</p> <p>Because big assumptions act as filters and are thought of as being factual, they inform what people see, leading to the systematic and unconscious attendance to certain data and the avoidance or deletion of other.</p> <p>Review what is written in column 3 and ask yourself what assumptions are these statements based upon.</p> <p>Look for assumptions that anchor and inform your specific hidden commitments – these are the assumptions that lead to those behaviours that undermine rather than support your goal.</p>

# Immunity to Change

## Moving Beyond the Big Assumptions

In order to overcome the inbuilt and unconscious immunity to change, the next step is to examine the big assumptions. Its not about making any change in thinking or behaviour, but a time to reflect and become more aware of how the big assumptions influence their choices. The steps to doing this are:

- Review each big assumption that is listed one at a time. Note any that are obviously and patently false – and why you ascertain that to be the case. Write this down so you can see it stated in black and white (don't just cross out the assumption, in order to disempower it – being clear on why it is untrue is important to articulate)
- Note any assumption which feel true but there may be some ambiguity in your mind (they might / might not be true – or it could be true in one context but not another)
- Note any assumptions that are seen to be true for the Mentee. Have him or her search specifically for any of their own experiences that might cause them to question the assumption ( this is a review often of deleted information or rejection of evidence due to the hold the assumption has over the individual) - it could also be that the Mentee has noticed that this assumption doesn't hold true for others from their experience.
- Exploring the history or the biography of the assumption. This is like a root cause analysis where we test the veracity of the assumption as being valid in the here and now by looking to its source. There are a range of questions to be posed at this point:
  - How and when did this assumption first appear and take hold. What experience/s informed it's formation?
  - How long has it been around and 'running' the Mentee's world view?
  - What have been some of the critical turning points in relation to this assumption?
  - How does this assumption apply to the present self, and who the Mentee wishes to become?

**NOTE :** This step often has people feel dissatisfied with the foundation of the big assumption, particularly when they see that the ideas held have been colouring their experiences and choices for many years. (NOTE: you may wish to refer back to Phase 1 where we covered the neurology of belief in the Ladder of Inference) if it seems relevant to explain how this happens from a programming and filtering perspective.

- Identify how to safely test the assumption. It is usually a good idea at this point for you as the Mentor to take the role of the sounding board and partner on running of tests. This is because if left to their own devices the Mentee will tend to create tests that are either too risky or so tentative that they don't actually challenge the assumption, and in fact re-confirm it's validity. It is important in this step – to clarify the support the Mentee will need to run the test and 'try out' acting in a new way.
- Evaluate the Results. This is the last step, it may be that more than one test is needed in order to finally collapse or modify the grip of the big assumption. We are then looking to find ways to acknowledge the competing commitment (if it is shown to be truly relevant and important) , whilst also enabling the behaviours that will address the achievement of the initial goal.

# Immunity to Change

## Pulling it all Together

Now that the big assumptions have been identified, there are some other considerations that as the Mentor you need to keep in mind when working with the Mentee on testing their assumptions.

- Make sure there is safety
- Start with the smaller and then move to the bigger assumptions
- If possible ask for feedback from others who were involved in the running of the test – their response, what they said, or noticed.
- What were the Mentee’s thoughts and feelings during the test
- What is the data that has been accumulated – facts, directly observable actions rather than interpretations of ascription of meaning; Have the Mentee describe this in details (check whether others involved would also agree with the Mentee description)
- Any unusual occurrences happen during the test that need to be explored?
- Take time to support your Mentee in their reflection on their experience of the tests and what they noticed – invite the balcony perspective
- Explore the data gathered in the tests and ask the following questions:
  - Have the Mentee describe what happened in the test – the data that was collected
  - What is the Mentee’s interpretation of what happened during the testing of the assumption?
  - Are there any other interpretations that might also apply to this same data? (push this to move beyond predictable interpretations to other possibilities)
  - What new insights does the Mentee have about this big assumption? (confirmations and disconfirmations)
  - What choices does this now provide that the Mentee didn’t hold before the test.
- Now, you can go back and refine the grid with this information in mind.
- Identify and key hooks that need to be released EG. self-talk that needs to be halted and replaced with a new internal dialogue.
- Discuss how a new world view impacts the wider experience for the Mentee in their life.
- Agree with the Mentee a time frame to pay attention to and practice the new behaviours ( 21 days minimum ) plus at least 30 minutes of reflection and embedding, and/or modify approaches. NOTE: It is important that the Mentee observes themselves neutrally – thoughts, emotions, feelings and behaviours.
- Mentee needs to accept the fact that trying new things will feel awkward at first
- Get the Mentee to get input from others as to how they are tracking on implementing their new behaviours