MODEL BRIEF · VERSION 1.0 · SEPTEMBER 2026

The 4-Layer Model

Why We Experience, Believe, and Choose Differently

Our opinions do not appear from nowhere. Before we explain the world, we may already differ in what catches our attention, how it is experienced, and how we are disposed to respond.

01	**Disposition** A relatively stable starting tendency: sensitivity to reward, threat, novelty, safety, competition, and protection.
02	**Response** Before explicit belief: what becomes salient, how the world appears, and what immediate attraction, aversion, approach, or avoidance follows.
03	**Belief** Persistent world-models and value-models built through experience, learning, memory, and reasoning.
04	**Choice** What the person actually does after more of the person has entered the process: memory, belief, prediction, deliberation, and context.

A MAP,
NOT THE TERRITORY.

Four layers are a deliberate simplification - simple enough to remember, detailed enough to preserve the distinctions that matter. The word “choice” does not imply independence from prior causes.

THE GROUND BENEATH THE MAP

What Research Has Found

We are shaped more than we realize.

Research across behavioral genetics, psychology, physiology, and the social sciences suggests that beliefs and choices are shaped by more than conscious reasoning alone. Genetics, temperament, physiology, learning, culture, history, and environment can all tilt what becomes salient, how we respond, and what we later come to believe.

SAME EVENT ≠ SAME EXPERIENCE ≠ SAME RESPONSE

BEFORE BELIEF

People may differ in attention, salience, felt threat or promise, and immediate orientation before explicit reasoning begins.

ACROSS TIME

Learning, memory, repeated experience, and feedback from past choices can shape the beliefs that become stable and familiar.

IN CONTEXT

Culture, institutions, social settings, and historical conditions influence what is learned, reinforced, permitted, or costly.

WHAT THE MODEL DOES

The 4-Layer Model does not claim these findings as its own. It organizes and compresses a broad body of work into a clear, public-facing model: **Disposition → Response → Belief → Choice.**

SELECTED STARTING POINTS

Hibbing, Smith & Alford - research on predispositions, psychological/physiological differences, and political orientations. **Turi Munthe** - a broad synthesis of biological, genetic, environmental, cultural, historical, and social influences on belief formation.

WHY TRANSLATE IT

The Aim of the Model

Understand difference before judging it.

The aim of the 4-Layer Model is not to discover human difference anew. It is to make what we already know about human difference easier to see, remember, discuss, and use.

01

Translate complexity

Turn a large and fragmented body of research into a compact language that can travel beyond specialist writing.

02

Change the first question

Move from “What is wrong with them?” toward “Where might this difference begin?” Explanation does not erase disagreement; it changes how disagreement starts.

03

Let the idea travel

Use tests, music, video, interactive formats, and other forms of experience so people can encounter the model, not just read about it.

RESEARCH PROVIDES THE PIECES. THE 4-LAYER MODEL DRAWS A MAP.
DIFFERENT MEDIA LET PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE MAP.

Tests · music · video · interactive formats · other experiences

The goal is not to erase disagreement or to say that every belief is equally sound. It is to make room for explanation before contempt.

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