

R E G I O N O F D O U B T

It is useful to evaluate staff members by an intellectual trait referred to as “region of doubt,” i.e., the percent of times they assume their opinions and decisions to be correct. Individuals with a narrow region of doubt are extremely confident in their opinions, worldview, and decisions. Those with a wide region of doubt tend to have much less confidence in their opinions, worldview, and decisions.

One key to leadership, as well as life success, is finding the right region of doubt for a given circumstance. We all have different competencies in various domains of life depending on our natural ability, talent, training, and experience. As such, it is appropriate for us to have a fairly narrow region of doubt in one life domain, while our limited talents and expertise should result in us having a wide region of doubt in another.

Unfortunately, many individuals seem to be stuck with either too narrow or too wide a region of doubt in most every instance they confront in life. Effective leaders can help staff to find the “right” region of doubt.

If a leader is competent and talented within a given domain, the optimal “region of doubt” is approximately 15%. With a region of doubt of this size, a leader should expect that roughly 3 out of 20 times other individuals will be correct when they suggest that a better decision is available than the one made initially by the leader. This does not suggest that the original decision was wrong, but simply that a better alternative existed. This 15% is a narrow enough region of doubt to allow for the confidence and assurance that is necessary to lead on an important issue, but is still wide enough to leave room for a leader to accept suggestions and feedback.



This region of doubt concept is one that can be effectively discussed with individual employees. With some, you will be narrowing their region of doubt, i.e., building their confidence and encouraging them to be less differential. With others, you will be assertively trying to shake their confidence a bit so that they will be more open to new information and input from others, i.e., widening their region of doubt. You may well find these latter types to be initially resistive to such input – a situation that makes them resistant to the new learning so essential for professional growth. Supervisors are in a strong position to encourage these individuals to spend more time actively considering the input of others.

A supervisor has several options to help narrow an employee's region of doubt. Simply affirming your confidence in the employee's ability can be impactful. A deeper analysis can be achieved by exploring MindSet's *cognitive blunders* and teaching healthier thought patterns. It is also good to consider if the employee's high region of doubt might result from overestimating the confidence and competence of others. If so, their decision making set point may be off due to an incorrect assumption that others are always at 95% assurance when they make decisions. It can be helpful to demystify their assessment of others in authority by having other leaders openly share their own uncertainty, and even occasional trepidation, when making decisions.

In contrast, if we have members of our staff who chronically operate using a narrower region of doubt than their talent or knowledge would warrant, they will often move precipitously without the benefit of counsel from others. Such an employee may benefit from an assertive visit openly addressing this growth area with someone who they hold in high regard. Often they will also benefit from MindSet's **active listening training** – a skill set that will slow their decision making and assure greater input from others.

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