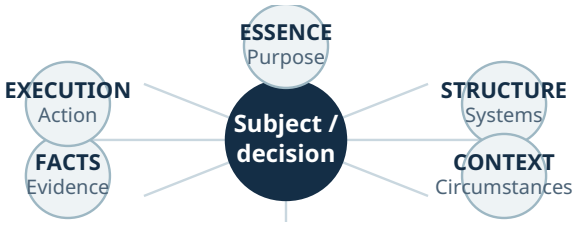
AbsCon-Layer-Thinking

Thinking across levels. Learning through action.

A practical introduction to ACL and its application to complex decisions in financial services.

Problems visible in technology, operations or revenue may have causes elsewhere in the institution. ACL encourages examination of purpose, structures, circumstances, evidence and action - while questioning how the issue itself has been defined.



A simple picture of ACL: one concrete subject, examined through several connected lenses.

FOUR CONNECTED IDEAS

01 / Reference lenses

Move between abstract and concrete perspectives to examine an issue.

02 / Nested scope

The relevant “current position” changes with the subject being examined.

03 / ARC learning

Use action, observation and reflection to inform redesign and further action.

04 / ACL Shift

Recognize a possible change in the wider frame of understanding over time.

FIVE USEFUL LENSES - NOT FIVE REQUIRED STEPS

Essence - purpose and fundamental objectives; **Structure** - systems and relationships; **Context** - circumstances and timing; **Facts** - evidence and observed conditions; **Execution** - decisions, action and outcomes.

> **Start where the issue is most visible.** Move freely between lenses. Some situations may require fewer or more distinctions; completing five boxes is not the objective.

Learning and change are related - not identical.

THE ARC LEARNING CYCLE

Action produces experience. We observe what happened, reflect on the difference between expectations and reality, abstract useful learning, redesign the approach, and test again. The conversation may begin from prior experience rather than a newly completed cycle.

ACT
Try a decision or initiative.

OBSERVE
Examine actual outcomes.

REFLECT
Understand why it happened.

REDESIGN
Apply learning and try again.

Abstracting useful learning connects reflection with redesign. The four panels offer a practical summary of how decisions can be informed by experience and tested again.

THE ACL SHIFT

An ACL Shift is a possible change in the broader interpretation of a subject or situation, not simply an improvement in the existing process. It may be incremental, gradual, unnoticed, triggered externally or emerge through repeated experimentation.

ARC asks

What did we do? What happened? What have we learned? What should we try next?

Shift asks

Has the way we understand the subject changed? Are we now asking a materially different question?

> **A successful ARC cycle does not automatically create an ACL Shift.** Nor does every Shift signify progress. A later perspective may be different without necessarily being better.

NESTED PERSPECTIVES

A business, a client relationship and a transformation program can each be examined as a distinct subject. A task that is concrete at enterprise level may be central when that task becomes the subject of analysis.

Illustration: when a delivery problem may be a decision problem.

A financial institution's transformation program is late, costly and losing support. Conventional program-recovery techniques may be necessary. ACL-inspired inquiry explores whether the problem has been framed too narrowly.

EXECUTION / FACTS

Missed milestones, repeated rework, unclear ownership and competing requirements.

CONTEXT / STRUCTURE

Regulatory constraints, legacy systems, decision rights and incentives across business lines.

ESSENCE

What is the program ultimately meant to achieve for clients, the institution and its risk obligations?

POSSIBLE REFRAMING

What appears to be a technology-delivery issue may involve operating-model design and executive decisions.

THE INCREMENTAL TEST

Strong conventional analysis can already reveal governance and ownership problems. An ACL approach must earn its value by making a relationship clearer, changing a decision worth making, or directing attention to evidence that would otherwise be missed.

> **Do not mistake a revised label for a result.** Build competing hypotheses, obtain evidence from the institution, assess risk and economics, and test a small operational change where feasible.

FROM PERSPECTIVE TO ACTION

FRAME
Clarify the decision and subject.

TEST
Compare explanations with evidence.

DECIDE
Identify realistic options and trade-offs.

LEARN
Implement, observe and refine.

Applying disciplined thinking to executive choices.

Adviceist combines more than four decades of financial-services operating and consulting experience with ACL-informed inquiry. The business decision comes first; methodology serves the decision, not the reverse.

WHERE IT MAY BE USEFUL

Client and revenue economics

Question assumptions about coverage, business-line boundaries, client value and return.

Operating-model choices

Test accountability, process dependencies, incentives and execution constraints.

Executive transformation

Reassess the relationship between strategic purpose, delivery realities and outcomes.

Strategic opportunities

Explore alternatives while retaining commercial, regulatory and risk discipline.

THREE QUESTIONS TO BEGIN

What outcome matters most? What explanation are we taking for granted? What evidence would change our decision?

AN INVITATION TO DISCUSS

Adviceist welcomes a brief, confidential exchange with financial-services leaders about a concrete decision, the available evidence and options worth testing.

REQUEST A CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATION

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