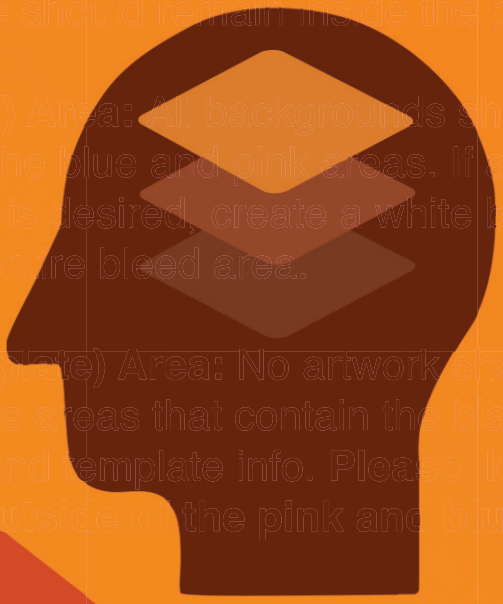
"In a time when AI can accelerate noise as easily as insight, CRAFT Thinking™ gives leaders a disciplined way to slow down, think clearly, and make better decisions." — ***Ryan K. Lahti, PhD | Founder & Strategic Advisor, OrgLeader® | Author of* The Finesse Factor**



CRAFT Thinking™

A Playbook for Clear Thinking and Better Decisions with AI

Philip Topham

Using CRAFT for Elevated Leadership

This chapter demonstrates where CRAFT Thinking™ stops being a productivity tool and becomes a leadership discipline. It shows how executives use structured prompting to surface assumptions, weigh trade-offs, and guide better decisions. The chapters before it teach the mechanics; the chapters after it focus on foresight, governance, and embedding AI into how organizations lead.

Chapter 7:

Using CRAFT for Elevated Leadership

Why CRAFT is a thinking shift, not a toolkit—and how leaders take it further.

CRAFT Thinking™ gives you a structure: five deliberate steps to turn guesswork into clarity. But structure alone isn't what transforms teams, companies, or strategy.

That takes leadership.

Tools don't drive change. People do.

And in an era where AI can churn out passable content by the terabyte, your role isn't to get more out of the machine.

Your role is to get more out of your thinking.

The executives, team leads, and consultants who will thrive in this next era aren't the ones chasing novelty. They're the ones building capability. Modeling clarity. Translating ambiguity into action.

CRAFT Thinking™ is your toolset. But clarity is a discipline. And this chapter is your call to use it.

Quick Recap: The CRAFT Framework

By now, you know the five parts:

- **C = Context**—Ground the prompt in the situation that matters.
- **R = Role**—Choose the perspective or expert lens.
- **A = Action**—Define exactly what you want the AI to do.
- **F = Format**—Specify the shape of the answer.
- **T = Target**—Tailor the output to the real end-user.

Together, they give you precision without overthinking. Flexibility without vagueness. They raise the quality of your input, so the output is worth your time.

But frameworks don't lead. You do.

From Productivity to Leadership

Many teams meet AI in "get it done" mode. That's useful. But it's only half the value. CRAFT Thinking™ enables two distinct modes of work.

Mode 1: Productivity (Output Mode)

Purpose: Finish tasks faster and with fewer errors

Typical prompts: Summarize, draft, restructure, translate, convert

Output: Documents, lists, summaries, code, slides

Time horizon: Immediate

Primary user: An individual contributor

Success metric: Speed and accuracy

Mode 2: Leadership (Thinking Mode)

Purpose: Improve thinking, decisions, and alignment

Typical prompts: Surface assumptions, weigh trade-offs, compare options, pressure-test plans, reveal risks, and second-order effects

Output: Clear choices, decision principles, risks and mitigations, aligned next steps

Time horizon: Near and long term

Primary user: A leader and their team

Success metric: Better decisions and sustained capability

One-line distinction: If you use CRAFT to do more tasks faster, you're in Productivity Mode. If you use CRAFT to frame decisions, expose assumptions, and align others, you're in Leadership Mode.

The Leadership Shift in Practice

Leadership isn't a performance of certainty. It's the discipline of thinking clearly when things are uncertain. AI doesn't change that; it just exposes it faster.

What distinguishes effective leaders today isn't how much they know, but how they think—how they frame decisions, test assumptions, and guide others toward alignment. The best don't delegate that process to machines; they use AI as a thinking partner to sharpen their own judgment.

Leadership in the AI era doesn't require a technical background. It requires three disciplines:

1. A willingness to engage uncertainty
2. Clarity about what matters
3. A method to bring others along

CRAFT operationalizes all three. It gives structure to reflection, framing, and translation—so you can model, teach, and repeat them across your team.

That's where the leader's CRAFT loop comes in.

The Leader's CRAFT Loop

Here's how to use the leader's CRAFT loop in practice:

1. **Frame the decision** with context and target. What outcome matters, for whom, by when?

2. **Choose Role(s)** to expand the lens. Ask for multiple expert views if the call is complex.
3. **Specify Actions** that compare, stress-test, and synthesize options—not just produce artifacts.
4. **Set Formats** that force clarity: a decision memo, risks table, 30/90-day plan, KPI list.
5. **Align to the Target** again. Tailor to the actual audience who must act.

"After-Prompts" That Turn Output into Leadership

The quality of a leader's thinking shows up in the questions they ask after the first answer. Once you've used CRAFT to get an initial result, don't stop there. Add one or two of these "after-prompts" to elevate the conversation from information to insight.

- **Assumptions:** "List the top five assumptions behind this recommendation. Which are most fragile, and how could we test them cheaply?"
- **Trade-offs:** "Summarize the trade-offs across cost, speed, risk, and brand. What does each option optimize and sacrifice?"
- **Implications:** "Identify second- and third-order effects if this succeeds and if it fails."
- **Blind spots:** "What are we likely overlooking? Which stakeholders would disagree and why?"
- **Decision:** "Given our strategy and constraints, what decision would you recommend and what would change your mind?"
- **Next steps:** "Write the first three irreversible steps and the first three reversible steps."

The 10-Minute CRAFT Leadership Ritual

Leadership isn't about having more meetings; it's about having smarter ones.

This simple 10-minute ritual helps teams use CRAFT Thinking™ to frame, test, and commit to better decisions—without turning every discussion into a workshop.

1. **Context (one minute):** What are we deciding, by when, and for whom?

2. **Options (three minutes):** Ask AI to surface three viable paths with pros and cons tied to your strategy.
3. **Risks (two minutes):** Probe for what could go wrong and how to test assumptions quickly.
4. **Decision (two minutes):** Request a clear recommendation plus a 30/90-day checkpoint plan.
5. **Commit (two minutes):** Capture owners, first steps, and the evidence that would trigger a pivot.

Ten minutes is enough to replace circular debate with structured clarity.

It builds a repeatable habit: start with context, surface options, name the risks, decide, and commit.

Do it consistently, and every meeting becomes a leadership exercise—not a time sink.

Team Implementation

Consider the following useful strategies and tools for team implementation.

- **Onboarding:** Teach CRAFT as the default way to ask for help—from AI and from each other.
- **Templates:** Create two templates in your knowledge base:
  - *Productivity template:* Context, Role, Action, Format, Target. Include example prompts for drafting and summarizing.
  - *Leadership template:* Context, Target, Roles, Actions for comparison/risks/implications, Format as a decision memo, and a sign-off checklist.
- **Weekly review:** Run a 30-minute CRAFT Thinking™ clinic. Bring one decision and one deliverable. Improve both with after-prompts. Capture exemplars.
- **Tooling:** If you deploy a custom assistant, configure it to flag missing CRAFT elements and suggest after-prompts automatically.

Common Failure Modes

As you roll out CRAFT Thinking™ to the team, be alert for these common failure modes:

- **Tool-first thinking:** Rolling out AI features without changing how decisions are framed.
- **Output worship:** Equating more slides or longer memos with better thinking.
- **Role confusion:** Asking for a single expert lens when the decision demands multiple.
- **Audience neglect:** Delivering the right answer in the wrong format for the real decision-maker.
- **No tests:** Approving plans without explicitly naming assumptions and cheap tests.

The 60-Second Diagnostic

Ask these five questions after any AI-assisted deliverable:

1. What decision will this enable, and by when?
2. Whose perspective shaped it, and which perspectives are missing?
3. What are the top assumptions, and how will we test them?
4. What trade-offs are we choosing, and why?
5. What happens next week if we say yes—and if we say no?

If you can't answer these quickly, you're still in productivity mode.

A Short Case: Finance

Productivity Mode prompt:

```
Summarize last quarter's results and draft three
slides for the board.
```

Leadership Mode prompt:

```
Given last quarter's results and our strategy to
expand margins, compare three options to improve
cash conversion over the next 90 days. Reveal
```

```
assumptions, quantify trade-offs, propose two
low-cost tests, and draft a one-page decision memo
for the CFO.
```

Outcome: The first produces slides. The second produces a decision.

Capability Doesn't Come from Adoption Alone

You can share this book with your team. You can build CRAFT into onboarding and SOPs. You can even train a custom GPT to coach people in real time. Those are good moves—but capability only compounds when behavior changes.

Change doesn't happen because your team downloaded a PDF. It happens when someone raises the bar on how they think, how they ask, and how they lead.

This isn't a prompt problem. It's a leadership opportunity.

A Leadership Checkpoint

Every system needs checkpoints. So does leadership.

Before you scale your use of CRAFT, pause to evaluate how it's shaping your habits.

Ask yourself:

- Am I still prompting for output instead of clarity?
- Am I applying structure without reflection?
- Am I using CRAFT to think faster—or better?

Leaders who stop to recalibrate think longer-term. They don't just automate tasks. They elevate judgment.

A Brief Review

CRAFT Thinking™ began as a way to get clearer answers. By now, you've seen it's really a way to build clearer leaders.

When used well, CRAFT turns prompting into a habit of structured reflection—framing decisions, surfacing assumptions, and aligning people around purpose. That's what separates productivity from leadership: not more output, but better judgment.

With that foundation set, you're ready to move from clarity to depth.

Coming Up Next: From Reflection to Refinement

You've paused to assess your habits; now it's time to put that awareness to work.

The next chapter takes you beyond structured prompting into the real practice of thinking with AI.

You'll learn how to break the "search-and-stop" reflex, challenge the first answer, and use CRAFT to refine—not just respond.

Because leadership isn't found in faster answers; it's forged in better questions.