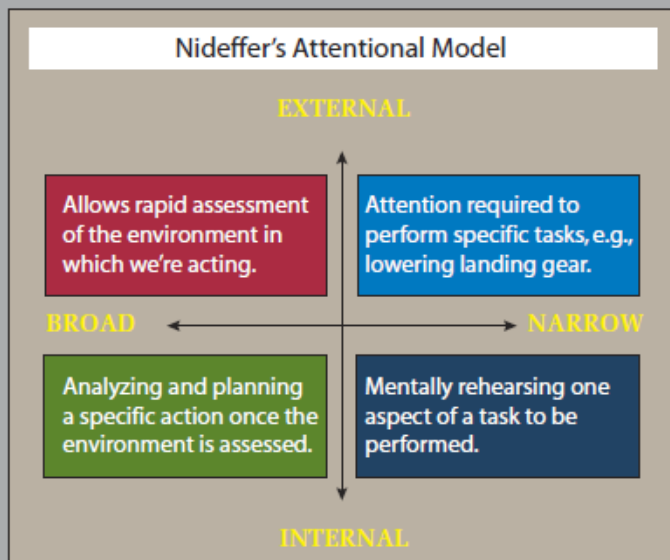


How We Concentrate

Dr. Robert Nideffer is a psychologist who developed the classic theoretical model of how humans concentrate for his 1976 book, *The Inner Athlete*, which delved into the psychology of successful sports figures. His model, known as the Theory of Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS), is an assessment tool used worldwide to measure the concentration and interpersonal skills of people in many different fields, not just sports. The basic grid of the TAIS is depicted at right. In his model, two dimensions of attention are recognized: width (broad to narrow) and direction (external to internal).

A broad attention span considers many items simultaneously. Conversely and unsurprisingly, narrowing our attention limits us to one or a small number of observations. In sports, an example of the former might include a football quarterback surveying the defense before a play while the latter could include a baseball batter preparing to receive a pitch.

The internal and external grid components reflect how we may perceive an action we're planning or taking. Externally, for example, we know the basic tasks required to fly an ILS approach to minimums and how it should look to an observer. Meanwhile, internally, we become focused on the specifics of flying that procedure: tuning the appropriate radio, setting the heading indicator, configuring the autopilot, reducing power and/or lower-



ing the landing gear to begin a descent, looking for the runway environment, etc.

One key here is not for us to study theoretical and applied psychology. But we do need to know how humans typically approach problem solving and how we concentrate our minds on tasks we must perform. Another is to understand how we can focus on one problem to the exclusion of other equally important ones.