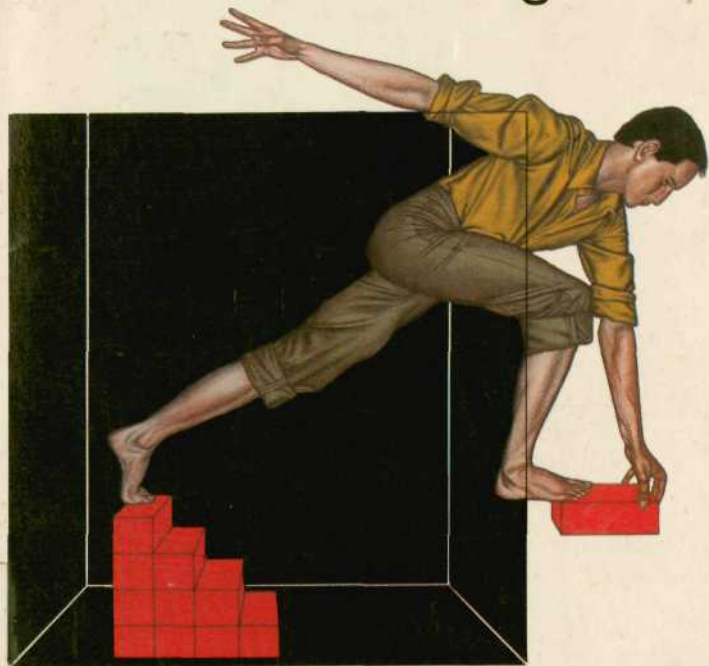



EDWARD DE BONO

Lateral Thinking



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Summary

The emphasis in education has always been on logical sequential thinking which is by tradition the only proper use of information. Creativity is vaguely encouraged as some mysterious talent. This book has been about lateral thinking. Lateral thinking is not a substitute for the traditional logical thinking but a necessary complement. Logical thinking is quite incomplete without lateral thinking.

Lateral thinking makes quite a different use of information from logical (vertical) thinking. For instance the need to be right at every step is absolutely essential to logical thinking but quite unnecessary in lateral thinking. It may sometimes be necessary to be wrong in order to dislocate a pattern sufficiently for it to reform in a new way. With logical thinking one makes immediate judgements, with lateral thinking one may delay judgements in order to allow information to interact and generate new ideas.

The twin aspects of lateral thinking are first the provocative use of information and second the challenge to accepted concepts. Underlying both these aspects is the main purpose of lateral thinking which provides a means to restructure patterns. This restructuring of patterns is necessary to make better use of information that is already available. It is an insight restructuring.

The mind is a pattern making system. The mind creates patterns out of the environment and then recognizes and uses such patterns. This is the basis of its effectiveness. Because the sequence of arrival of information determines how it is to be arranged into a pattern such patterns are always less than the best possible arrangement of information. In order to bring such patterns up to date and so make better use of the contained information one

needs a mechanism for insight restructuring. This can never be provided by logical thinking which works to relate accepted concepts not to restructure them. Lateral thinking is demanded by the behaviour of this type of information processing system in order to bring about insight restructuring. The provocative function of lateral thinking and the challenging function are both directed towards this end. In both cases information is used in a manner that goes beyond reason for lateral thinking works outside of reason. Yet the need for lateral thinking is based quite logically on the deficiencies of a self-maximizing memory system which is the type of system that makes the mind capable of humour.

Lateral thinking works at an earlier stage than vertical thinking. Lateral thinking is used to restructure the perceptual pattern which is the way a situation is looked at. Vertical thinking then accepts that perceptual pattern and develops it. Lateral thinking is generative, vertical thinking is selective. Effectiveness is the aim of both.

In ordinary traditional thinking we have developed no methods for going beyond the adequate. As soon as something is satisfactory our thinking must stop. And yet there may be many better arrangements of information beyond the merely adequate. Once one has reached an adequate answer then it is difficult to proceed by logical thinking because the rejection mechanism which is the basis of logical thinking can no longer function well. With lateral thinking one can easily proceed beyond the adequate by insight restructuring.

Lateral thinking is especially useful in problem solving and in the generation of new ideas. But it is not confined to these situations for it is an essential part of all thinking. Without a method for changing concepts and bringing them up to date one is liable to be trapped by concepts which are more harmful than useful. Moreover rigid concept patterns can actually create a great number of problems. Such problems are particularly fierce, since they cannot be altered by available evidence but only by insight restructuring.

The need to change ideas is becoming more and more obvious as technology speeds up the rate of communication and progress. We

have never developed very satisfactory methods for changing ideas but have always relied on conflict. Lateral thinking is directed towards bringing about changes in ideas through insight restructuring.

Lateral thinking is directly concerned with insight and with creativity. But whereas both these processes are usually only recognized after they have happened lateral thinking is a deliberate way of using information in order to bring them about. In practice lateral thinking and vertical thinking are so complementary that they are mixed together. Nevertheless it is best to treat them as distinct in order to understand the basic nature of lateral thinking and acquire skill in its use. This also prevents confusion because the principles governing the use of information in lateral thinking are quite different from the ones used in vertical thinking.

It is difficult to acquire any sort of skill in lateral thinking simply by reading about it. In order to develop such skill one must practise and go on practising and that is why there has been such emphasis in this book on practice sessions. Nor are exhortation and goodwill enough. There are specific techniques for the application of lateral thinking. The purpose of such techniques is two-fold. They can be used for their own sake but more importantly they can be used to develop the lateral habit of mind.

In order to use lateral thinking effectively one needs a practical language tool. Such a tool is necessary to allow one to use information in the special way required by lateral thinking and also to indicate to others what is being done. This tool is PO. PO is an insight tool. PO is the laxative of language. It acts to relax the rigidity of the tight patterns so easily formed by mind, and to provoke new patterns.

Lateral thinking is not concerned with generating doubt for the sake of doubt or chaos for the sake of chaos. Lateral thinking acknowledges the extreme usefulness of order and of pattern. But it emphasizes the need for changing these to bring them up to date and make them even more useful. Lateral thinking particularly emphasizes the dangers of rigid patterns which the mind is so apt to construct because of the way it handles information.