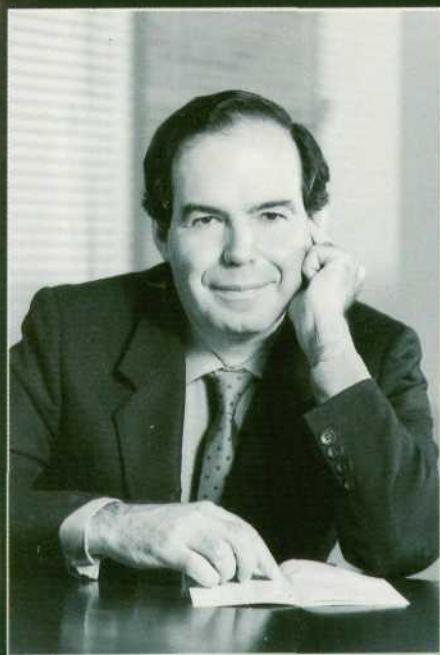


Serious
Creativity



Edward
de
Bono

*Using the Power
of Lateral Thinking
to Create New Ideas*

*By the bestselling author of The Use of
Lateral Thinking*

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Summary

My purpose in writing this book has been to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of lateral thinking. The book is intended both as a reference book and as a user manual. Lateral thinking is specifically concerned with the changing of concepts and perceptions and the generation of new concepts and perceptions. The end products are usable ideas. Concepts, perceptions, and ideas come into all fields that require thinking. Unless what you are doing can be done with repeated automatic routines, there is a need for some skill in lateral thinking. It is my belief that every student in every university and every executive needs a copy of this book. The main points I make in the book can be summarized in the following way.

POINT 1

Creative thinking is rapidly growing in importance and will come to have as central a position as finance, raw materials, and people. As all organizations reach a plateau of competence, it is only better concepts that will provide the competitive advantage. Water is necessary for soup but soup is more than water. The water represents basic competence. As a business moves from competition to sur/petition the demand for powerful conceptual thinking must increase. New concepts will not come from the analysis of data because the mind can only see what it is prepared to see. There has to be the ability to create new concepts.

Competent organizations have a powerful potential, but that potential is wasted unless the organization machine is used to put powerful ideas into action.

Creative thinking is just as important for those organizations that are still climbing towards the plateau of competence. There is a real need for creative thinking to find better ways of achieving quality, cost-cutting, and continuous improvement.

The world faces a growing number of problems. Many of these will not yield to the simple analysis technique of searching for the cause and seeking to remove the cause. In many cases, the cause cannot be removed and there is a need to "design" a way forward with the creation of new concepts. From where are these new concepts going to come if not from creative thinking?

POINT 2

We now know, for the first time in history, that there is an absolute mathematical need for creativity in the human brain. Perception operates as a self-organizing information system in which incoming information arranges itself into patterns or sequences. These patterns are not symmetric and there is a need to be able to cut across patterns. This happens naturally in humor and in insight. It can be made to happen deliberately with the formal processes of lateral thinking. Because we can only recognize those creative ideas that are logical in hindsight we have mistakenly believed that logic is enough. This is totally incorrect in a patterning system.

It is the "time sequence" of our experience that sets up our concepts and perceptions. It is the time sequence of events that sets up our ways of doing things. It is the time sequence of history that sets up our structures and institutions. We may need to break free of this time sequence in order to make the full use of the potential of our experience that lies locked up by that time sequence.

POINT 3

Creativity is not a mystical talent that some people have and others can only envy. Lateral thinking is the type of creative thinking that can be learned, practiced, and used by everyone. Some people will be better at it than others, as with any skill. Learning lateral thinking will not make everyone a genius, but it will supplement existing thinking skills with a valuable ability to generate new ideas.

The traditional view that creative thinking is only a matter of releasing people from inhibitions and fears is old-fashioned and inadequate. The natural behavior of the brain is to form patterns

and to stick to them—that is why the brain is so excellent an arrangement for making sense of the world. So release from fears and inhibitions will only result in a mild increase in creativity. To be effectively creative we have to learn to do some things which are not natural to the brain. For example, we have to learn how to set up provocations and how to use them with the new mental operation of “movement.”

The “crazy” approach to creativity is very superficial and has held back the seriousness with which creative thinking should be treated. This “crazy” approach is based on insufficient understanding of what needs to happen in creative thinking. Creative thinking is not a scattergun approach in which we shoot out ideas in the hope that one will be useful. We can escape the restrictive effects of judgment in a much more powerful and deliberate manner using the formal and systematic techniques of lateral thinking. These can be used by individuals on their own or by groups. Groups are not essential, as they are in traditional brainstorming, which is part of the “crazy” tradition.

POINT 4

The systematic processes, tools, and techniques of lateral thinking are laid out in the book. Twenty-five years of experience have shown that these techniques can be learned and do work. Such basic processes as challenge, alternatives, and provocation can all be learned as deliberate techniques. It is not enough just to have a creative attitude and then to wait for something to happen. When you need a new idea it is possible to sit down and to use the systematic techniques to produce new ideas.

The ways in which the systematic techniques can be applied to such different situations as problem solving, improvement, opportunity design, and so on, are indicated in the book.

Creative thinking does not have to be a matter of waiting for inspiration.

POINT 5

In the book I have discussed the introduction of “serious creativity” into an organization. There is a need for someone senior to have responsibility as a “process champion”; otherwise, not

much will happen. Creative thinking should be established both in its own right and also to supercharge such ongoing programs as quality, cost-cutting, and continuous improvement. Practical points about training and structures for the ongoing use of creativity are discussed. Some leading organizations such as Du Pont and Prudential are already moving along this important road.

POINT 6

At the moment, most organizations pay lip service to the importance of creativity and make claims in the corporate advertising that are mainly cosmetic. Other organizations have an unwarranted complacency in the minor creative efforts that are being made. By and large, creativity is still regarded as something peripheral and as a luxury. The successful organizations of the future are those that have already begun to think differently. Creativity is essential to unlock the potential of your people and your organization. If there is a will to introduce and use serious creativity in a serious manner then there are available ways in which it can be done.* Unfortunately, there are many practitioners of creativity who have not advanced beyond the stage of believing that it is enough to encourage people to be a little bit crazy. That is no longer enough.

There is a real need for serious creativity. That explains the title of the book.

*For information on the introduction of serious creativity into an organization, please contact Diane McQuaig, Toronto, Canada, Fax (416) 488-4544.