

EDWARD DE BONO

Lateral Thinking for
Management



Contents

	<i>page</i>
Preface	1
Chapter 1 Lateral and vertical thinking	4
Chapter 2 The behavior of a patterning system	14
Chapter 3 What can one do about thinking?	43
Chapter 4 Basic principles of lateral thinking	47
Chapter 5 Techniques Group I. Recognizing current ideas	52
Chapter 6 Techniques Group II. Changing ideas by avoidance	60
Chapter 7 Judgement, evaluation, criticism, and the use of NO	78
Chapter 8 Change and discontinuity	88
Chapter 9 Techniques Group III. Change from within	93
Chapter 10 Techniques Group IV. Change from outside: Discontinuity methods	99
Chapter 11 Techniques Group V. Change from outside: Deliberate introduc- tion of discontinuity	105
Chapter 12 Formal settings for lateral thinking	115
Chapter 13 PO	132
Chapter 14 Training in lateral thinking	154
Chapter 15 Who needs lateral thinking?	186
Chapter 16 The dangers of creativity	213
Chapter 17 Summary	219
Chapter Notes	224

Lateral thinking is a process that can be used

Lateral thinking is a way of using information in order to bring about creativity. A creative result may come about for several reasons, including chance stimulation or the unusual coming together of pieces of information. Lateral thinking is not the description of a *result* but a deliberate *way of thinking*. As such it can be used, whereas a result can only be admired.

Skill not chance, temperament, or gift

We tend to regard creativity as something brought about by chance, or as the byproduct of an ego-seeking temperament, or as a mysterious magic gift which some people have and others do not. Creativity is all these things, but only because we have made no attempt to introduce discontinuity into our thinking in any other way. That is why we have to rely on these factors for creativity. Creativity will continue to be associated with these factors, but not in an exclusive manner, once we have developed skill in lateral thinking. Such skill can be developed by anyone who takes the trouble to learn the principles and practice the process. Creativity need no longer be a matter of chance, temperament, or gift.

Patterning nature of mind

The need for lateral thinking arises from the nature of mind as a self-organizing information system. The characteristic of this broad class of systems is that they create patterns and use them. This is the basis of their great effectiveness. The fundamental feature of a patterning system is continuity. But in addition to establishing and using patterns, one needs from time to time to *break out* of them and put the available information together in a different way. This is absolutely necessary because a pattern depends not so much on the information it contains but on the arbitrary sequence in which that information arrived. Restructuring of patterns is not strongly developed in the mind and that is why humor

and insight are so elusive. Lateral thinking is a way of using information in order to bring about the restructuring of patterns.

Escape from old ideas and generate new ones

The twin aspects of lateral thinking are the escape from old ideas and the generation of new ones. There does come a time when sheer pressure of events forces the restructuring of an old idea. But long before this enough information is available to allow the idea to be changed. By insight restructuring, one can change an idea before being forced to.

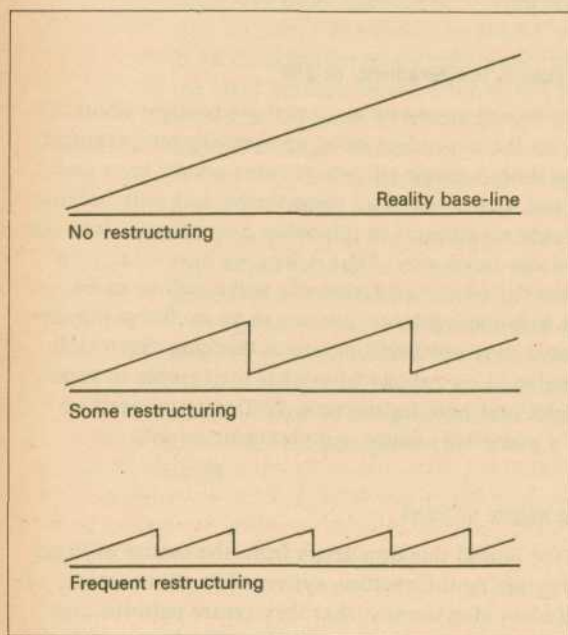


Figure 17-1.

Figure 17-1 shows the development of an idea as the reflection of "reality". ("Reality" is defined as that perception of events which gives the maximum effectiveness.) The idea diverges more and more from reality until pressure of events causes changes and the process starts again. If one can change ideas ahead of absolute necessity, then the process is as shown in the lowest part of the figure. Thus, one remains

close to reality all along. Restructuring is brought about by the escape from old ideas and the generation of new ones.

Lateral thinking is distinct from vertical thinking

The principles of lateral thinking are quite distinct from those of traditional, sequential, vertical thinking. Sometimes the principles are flatly contradictory. It is impossible to use lateral thinking unless one is quite clear about this distinction. For instance, in lateral thinking there may not be a reason for saying something until after it has been said. This provocative use of information is a basic principle of lateral thinking. Also in lateral thinking one may make use of an "intermediate impossible"; that is, a step which is quite unjustified on a logical, sequential basis but very useful as a stepping-stone to a new idea. The use of evaluation, judgment, and the NO function is quite different in lateral thinking. Lateral thinking seeks to find alternative ways of putting things together (lateral move) instead of looking for the best one and building on it (vertical move).

Lateral and vertical thinking are complementary

Lateral and vertical thinking are both required. Lateral thinking is concerned with the first stage of thinking, the stage of patterning, perceptual choice, and approach to the problem. Vertical thinking is concerned with second-stage processing and working out. Lateral thinking is concerned with choosing concepts, vertical thinking with using them. Lateral thinking requires vertical thinking to select and develop the ideas that are generated. Vertical thinking requires lateral thinking to establish an effective starting point. Skill in lateral thinking magnifies the effectiveness of skill in vertical thinking. And the other way around. Although the two types of thinking are distinct they are not substitutes; they are complementary.

Lateral thinking is practical

Lateral thinking is a practical way of using information and it can be learned, practiced, and used. The *first* stage is an understanding of the basis and necessity for lateral thinking. The *second* stage is developing an attitude of mind through familiarity with the principles. The *third* stage is the use of

specific techniques, both to bring about creative results and also to develop the lateral thinking habit. In the *fourth* stage, lateral thinking has become a natural skill that can be used as and when required without recourse to the special techniques.

The new functional word PO

Just as the word NO is the functional basis of logical thinking so the word PO is the functional basis of lateral thinking. PO crystallizes the whole concept of lateral thinking into a tool for language and thought. If one understands PO one understands lateral thinking. Even if PO is not used in actual speech, it remains a symbol of the lateral thinking attitude toward the use of information and the creation of ideas. Once there is a practical tool such as PO, it becomes possible to use it and to develop a skill that can be transferred from one situation to another. It also becomes possible to introduce training in lateral thinking at an early stage in education.

Different aspects of creativity

Creativity is not concerned only with invention and new products. These are but a minor aspect of creativity. Creativity is concerned with the way information is looked at and the way it is used. Creativity comes into problem solving and into decision making. Creativity is as much the business of executive management as of R&D departments. Creativity is not just a matter of risking money on new products but also of saving money through avoiding the costly continuity of out-of-date ideas.

Creativity is not a luxury

There was a time when creativity was thought to be a luxury used mainly by artists. This has changed. Nowadays, creativity is seen to be an essential part of thinking. Creativity being the change of ideas is inseparable from the use of ideas. Since everyone uses ideas, creativity is everyone's business. Creativity is the process of change. This does not have to be a matter of huge, "bulk" change-overs, for it can be a matter of small changes at sensitive points with a gradual liberation from the restrictions of an old idea. Creativity does not only

initiate change but it allows one to keep up with it. In a period of rapid change brought about by technology, education, communication, and developing attitudes one needs creativity more than ever. In a time of changing questions, shifting goals, and increasing complexity, one needs more than ever the ability to develop new ideas. As computers come to provide wonderful tools for information processing the emphasis is shifting back to the importance of ideas—the ideas that set the computer working, the ideas that make sense of the computer output.

Principles and use of lateral thinking

This book is not a collection of magic formulae to bring about creativity. Nor is it meant to be an inspirational book designed to sell the idea of creativity. The purpose of the book is to set out the *principles* and *use* of lateral thinking. Lateral thinking is not a “special” creativity gimmick but a fundamental way of thinking. There are various creativity techniques which have been developed and which make use of one or other of the basic principles of lateral thinking. Many people have used lateral thinking in the past. Many people are well aware of some of the principles involved. Lateral thinking is not a new magic, but a realization of the necessity for acknowledging this type of thinking as part of the thinking process. From this realization comes a need for formalization of the process so that those unacquainted with it can see what it is about, and those acquainted with it can find support for their way of thinking. This book is designed as a practical handbook for the development of skill in lateral thinking so that it may become a routine part of the thinking process.