

Lateral Thinking

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Lateral thinking is solving problems through an indirect and creative approach, using reasoning that is not immediately obvious and involving ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional step-by-step logic. The term lateral thinking was coined by Edward de Bono in the book *New Think: The Use of Lateral Thinking* published in 1967.

Methods

Critical thinking is primarily concerned with judging the true value of statements and seeking errors. Lateral thinking is more concerned with the movement value of statements and ideas. A person would use lateral thinking when they want to move from one known idea to creating new ideas. Edward de Bono defines four types of thinking tools:

Idea generating tools that are designed to break current thinking patterns--routine patterns, the status quo

Focus tools that are designed to broaden where to search for new ideas

Harvest tools that are designed to ensure more value is received from idea generating output

Treatment tools that are designed to consider real-world constraints, resources, and support

Random Entry Idea Generating Tool: Choose an object at random, or a noun from a dictionary, and associate that with the area you are thinking about.

For example imagine you are thinking about how to improve a web site. Choosing an object at random from an office you might see a fax machine. A fax machine transmits images over the phone to paper. Fax machines are becoming rare. People send faxes directly to phone numbers. Perhaps this could be a new way to embed the web site's content in emails and other sites.

Provocation Idea Generating Tool: choose to use any of the provocation techniques--wishful thinking, exaggeration, reversal, escape, or arising. Create a list of provocations and then use the most outlandish ones to move your thinking forward to new ideas.

Challenge Idea Generating Tool: A tool which is designed to ask the question Why? in a non-threatening way: why something exists, why it is done the way it is. The result is a very clear understanding of Why? which naturally leads to fresh new ideas. The goal is to be able to challenge anything at all, not just items which are problems.

For example you could challenge the handles on coffee cups. The reason for the handle seems to be that the cup is often too hot to hold directly. Perhaps coffee cups could be made with insulated finger grips, or there could be separate coffee cup holders similar to beer holders.

Concept Fan Idea Generating Tool: Ideas carry out concepts. This tool systematically expands the range and number of concepts in order to end up with a very broad range of ideas to consider.

Disproving: Based on the idea that the majority is always wrong (Henrik Ibsen, John Kenneth

Galbraith), take anything that is obvious and generally accepted as "goes without saying", question it, take an opposite view, and try to convincingly disprove it.

The other focus, harvesting and treatment tools deal with the output of the generated ideas and the ways to use them.

Lateral thinking and problem solving

Problem Solving: When something creates a problem, the performance or the status quo of the situation drops. Problem solving deals with finding out what caused the problem and then figuring out ways to fix the problem. The objective is to get the situation to where it should be.

For example, a production line has an established run rate of 1000 items per hour. Suddenly, the run rate drops to 800 items per hour. Ideas as to why this happened and solutions to repair the production line must be thought of, such as giving the worker a pay raise.

Creative Problem Solving: Using creativity, one must solve a problem in an indirect and unconventional manner.

For example, if a production line produced 1000 books per hour, creative problem solving could find ways to produce more books per hour, use the production line, or reduce the cost to run the production line.

Creative Problem Identification: Many of the greatest non-technological innovations are identified while realizing an improved process or design in everyday objects and tasks either by accidental chance or by studying and documenting real world experience....