

Clear and Creative Thinking

Your Key to Working Smarter

Herb Kindler, Ph.D.



A Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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Clear and Creative Thinking

Your Key to Working Smarter

Herb Kindler, Ph.D.

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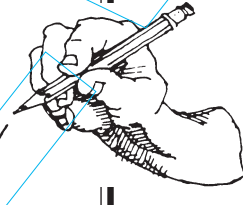
Learning Objectives For:

CLEAR AND CREATIVE THINKING

The objectives for *Clear and Creative Thinking* are listed below. They have been developed to guide you, the reader, to the core issues covered in this book.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK ARE:

- 1) To explain how clear thinking can open the reader's mind to new ways of looking at problems and opportunities
- 2) To explore creative and analytical techniques for generating fresh possibilities
- 3) To illustrate the role that values, culture, and goals have in resolving an issue successfully
- 4) To help readers understand and select appropriate strategies for implementing decisions



ASSESSING YOUR PROGRESS

In addition to the learning objectives above, Course Technology has developed a Crisp Series **assessment** that covers the fundamental information presented in this book. A 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter. To buy the assessment and answer key, go to www.courseilt.com and search on the book title or via the assessment format, or call 1-800-442-7477.

Assessments should not be used in any employee selection process.

About the Author

Herb Kindler, Ph.D., is director of Herb Kindler & Associates, a firm that conducts training programs on clear and creative thinking, managing disagreement constructively, stress management, and leadership skill building.

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Marilyn Ginsburg and Ron Jacobs for their helpful, creative, and clear-thinking contributions.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Peggy, Pat, Debbie, David, and Alex.

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Introduction

Why didn't I think of that!?

Do opportunities escape your attention? Do proposals have unexpected adverse consequences? Do problems go undetected too long? It isn't easy to step outside your own thinking, and even harder to see where your thinking went awry.

That's where clear thinking comes in. Clear and creative thinking precedes effective and compassionate action, advancing what you value. Practicing clear thinking enables you to improve your performance by:

- ▶ Drawing useful conclusions from limited information
- ▶ Tapping your creativity to generate fresh possibilities
- ▶ Translating promising opportunities into desired outcomes
- ▶ Using logic and intuition as allies to anticipate and resolve problems

So what exactly is *clear thinking*? Let's look at this term in relation to others used throughout the book in discussing creative and analytical thinking.

- ▶ Thinking is cognition and emotion that enables you to understand and appreciate the reality you and others perceive
- ▶ Clear thinking minimizes the influence of distorting filters such as mind-sets, attachments, assumptions, and expectations
- ▶ Creative thinking adds value by discovering or inventing new ways of looking at the familiar
- ▶ Critical thinking is the use of analytical reasoning to draw useful conclusions from limited information and to verify the truth of a claim or assertion

Based on hundreds of skill-building workshops, this book offers practical suggestions and helpful exercises for clear, effective thinking. Participating in this book's exercises will help you to make the concepts your own. As you work through the book, you will be learning how to:

- Judge the soundness of proposed ideas
- Avoid crises
- Heighten your awareness of bias
- Resolve ethical dilemmas
- Communicate in ways that foster empathic understanding

Start now by identifying a real-life issue of concern to you—something about your work, a disagreement, or a career question. Write your issue below. Think about this issue as you work through the book. Some of the exercises will have you referring to this focal issue as you apply clear-thinking concepts toward its resolution.

PREVIEW

P A R T

1

Opening Your Mind to Clear Thinking

“*Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in everyday life.*”

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

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PREVIEW

Developing a Whole-Picture Perspective

In a famous quote, Woody Allen once said, “More than at any time in history, mankind is at a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness, the other to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.”

Allen was poking fun at “either/or” ways of thinking—choosing between two undesirable alternatives. But too many people get bogged down in just such a quagmire with seemingly no way out.

Clear thinking helps you to break free of such a limited perspective.

That’s because clear thinking skills require looking at the *whole system* in which problems and opportunities occur. Except in the spiritual realm, everything is part of a larger system. By identifying a larger context, you open your mind to multiple possibilities rather than feeling compelled to choose the lesser of two evils.

When you look at the whole system in which problems and opportunities occur, you are receptive to new ways of thinking and responding.

Clear thinking helps you identify hidden assumptions and question unchallenged beliefs. It helps you break free of mind-set conditioning, the ways you have been *conditioned* to respond.

As you review the issue you recorded in the introduction, ask yourself:

What is the system or larger picture of which this issue is a part?

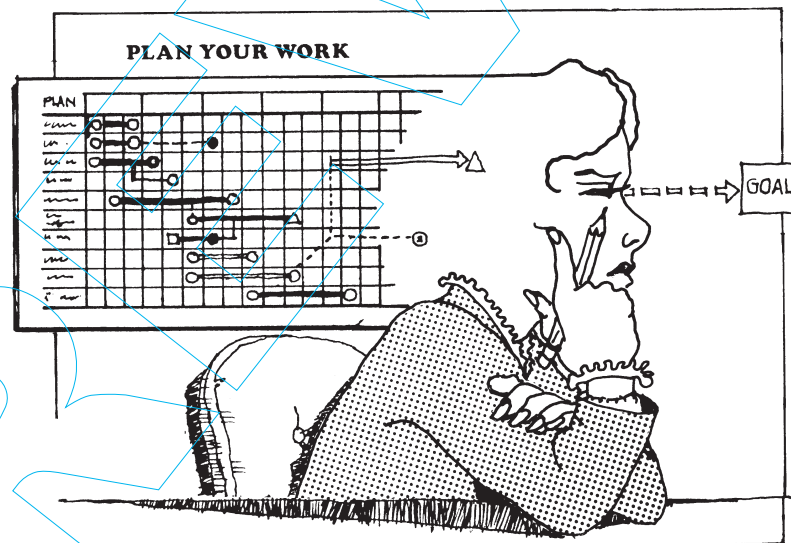
Two tools for whole-picture thinking are incremental and transformational strategies.

Incremental Thinking

Incremental thinking is appropriate when you feel essentially satisfied with the status quo and simply want modest improvements. In an organizational context, incremental thinking is the core of continuous improvement programs. Japanese manufacturers, masters of incremental improvement, call this kind of thinking *kaizen*.

Incremental change is step-by-step movement along the path by which you intend to reach your goals and realize your values. Each step within the current system aims at an improvement in *degree*.

Most people are able to think incrementally as they plan to do more of the same and do it better. Incremental thinking works for dealing with “maze problems,” in which step-by-step movement along a path will get you to your goal. It is when incremental changes fail to adequately advance your goals that a shift to transformational thinking is in order. Then it is time to “knock down maze walls” and rebuild.



Transformational Thinking

Rather than merely taking incremental steps toward change, transformational thinking involves forming a new concept of the current system. This results in a break in thinking. Transformational thinking is radical in that it changes established procedures. It challenges the assumptions underlying such statements as, “We’ve always done it this way.”

Transformational change is based on a new paradigm, a different way of thinking. It replaces an established framework and aims at renewal rather than refinement. Transformation is a change, not in degree (as in incremental thinking), but in *kind*.

Transformational thinking requires a cognitive leap and the emotional will to risk not knowing what’s next. You land in unfamiliar territory. Transformational thinking “breaks the mold.”

Management consultants Michael Hammer and James Champy advocate transformational thinking, which they call *reengineering*. “At the heart of business reengineering,” they say, “is discontinuous thinking—abandoning outdated rules and assumptions.”

Incremental vs. Transformational Thinking

Incremental

- Works within the current system
- Step-by-step improvements
- Changes in degrees
- More of the same, only better
- Like working through a maze
- Lower risk

Transformational

- Replaces established framework
- A different way of thinking
- Changes in kind
- Challenges assumptions
- Like knocking down walls and rebuilding
- Higher risk

CASE STUDY: A LESSON FROM HISTORY

Although the term *transformational thinking* may have been unknown a century ago, it was being practiced, as the following historical example illustrates.

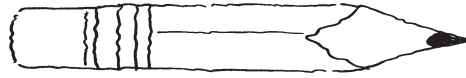
During his 1912 presidential campaign, Theodore Roosevelt planned a train trip to speak with voters and to distribute informative pamphlets. The pamphlet cover presented an impressive photograph of Roosevelt. Unfortunately, no one from Roosevelt's staff noticed—until three million copies were printed—the words under the photo that read: “Moffett Studios, Chicago.” Campaign chief George Perkins was horrified to learn that his campaign literature featured unauthorized copyrighted material, and the going rate for reproduced photos was one dollar per copy.

If the copyright holder demanded the full fee, the campaign would be bankrupt and the candidate's financial acumen brought into question. On the other hand, if the copyright issue were ignored, Roosevelt's ethics could be discredited. Instead of “either/or” thinking—choosing between two negatives—Perkins *transformed* a potential catastrophe by looking at the larger picture.

He wired Moffett:

“Planning on giving national publicity to your studios with three million pamphlets bearing your photograph of Theodore Roosevelt. Will you help defray the cost of pamphlet printing?” The publicity idea appealed to the Moffett Studios president who replied: “All I can afford is \$250.” Perkins accepted.

What might be another way you could have transformed the situation?



TRANSFORM THE PROFIT MARGIN

Try your hand at transformational thinking with the following scenario.

Assume you are CEO of a sporting goods company and you are dissatisfied with profit margins for the baseballs you manufacture. Your profit goal during the coming two-year period cannot be met by *incremental* changes such as lower costs through more efficient use of suppliers, reduced inventory, and altered production sequences.

You need to knock down some “maze walls.” What is your thinking about a transformational possibility?

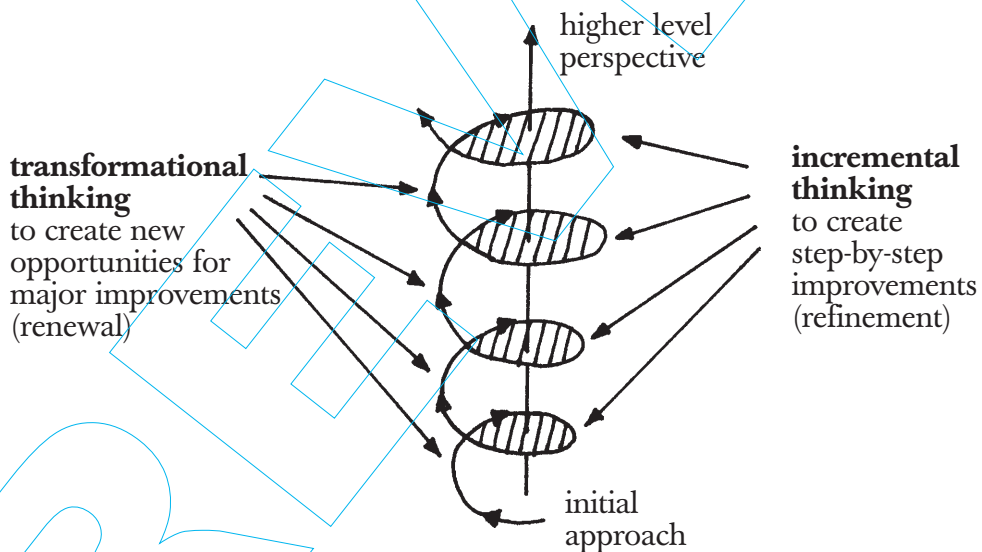
This scenario actually occurred in the Rawlings Sporting Goods Company in 1998. Its thinking was to identify a new sporting goods market that was largely untapped. The company proposed a new product that would monitor the speed of a pitched baseball. This market had been dominated by radar equipment priced between \$1,000 and \$1,500. Rawlings researchers embedded a microchip processor and liquid crystal display in baseballs to show how fast the balls traveled from the pitching mound to home plate. Priced at less than \$40 each, the product was an instant success.

Timing a Strategy Shift

It is one thing to understand the difference between the two whole-picture thinking strategies. But when do you know it is time to change from incremental to transformational thinking? One way is to map the rate of growth of a desired outcome.

For example, you can plot “profits” on a vertical axis and “time” on a horizontal axis. When profits are increasing at a healthy rate, *incremental* improvements are appropriate. All you need are refinements within the present system. Before you reach the point where profit growth tapers off, however, you should be hatching creative ideas for the next *transformational* change.

Although transformation is the more challenging strategy—requiring creativity and a supportive organizational culture—the two thinking strategies are complementary allies as suggested in the diagram below.



Transformational-Incremental Change Cycle

Combining Reasoning and Emotion

A common misconception holds that clear thinking cannot take place in the presence of emotion. But research now indicates that both cognitive reasoning and emotional involvement are essential for purposeful, effective, and satisfying engagement in life and work.

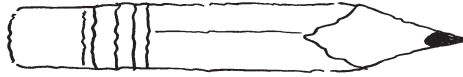
As neurologist Antonio Damasio concluded: “Certain aspects of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality. Feelings point us in the right direction, take us to the appropriate place in decision-making, where we may put the instruments of logic to good use. The emotional brain is as involved in reasoning as is the cognitive brain.” He goes on to say: “Reduction in emotion is at least as prejudicial to rationality as excessive emotion.”

In other words, when we are flooded or overwhelmed with feelings, rational thinking suffers. But by the same token, when we are not stirred or moved by emotion, we have little impetus to engage our rational minds in pursuing goals.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, adds: “We have two kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. The new paradigm urges us to find a balance of the two. . . to harmonize head and heart.”

In everyday language, when we ask ourselves: “What do I think about launching this project?” or “What do I think about Pat getting the promotion I expected?” we want integrated answers from both our logical and emotional sides.

Indeed, cognitive reasoning and emotional involvement are complementary skills in clear and creative thinking. It is on this premise that the *Thinking Preference Profile* is built. In the following self-scoring exercise, you will be able to examine your thinking preferences to help you further develop your capacity for clear, creative thinking.



YOUR THINKING PREFERENCE PROFILE

Quantifying your capacity to think clearly and creatively is as difficult as assigning numbers to motivation, morale, or modesty. Nevertheless, this profile questionnaire is designed to stimulate your inquiry into your thinking patterns.

Please respond to the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Circle one number for each question using the following key:

4 = almost always 3 = frequently 2 = occasionally 1 = almost never

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I use logic in reaching conclusions. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I weigh several factors when thinking about investing (such as my age, budget, future earnings). | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. I postpone decision making when I feel out of sorts or tired. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. My approach to relationships: "Are the rewards likely to be worth the effort?" | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I consult my feelings when deciding on a course of action. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I take the time to get emotionally centered before making important decisions. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I support my decisions with empirical evidence and reasonably objective facts. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. I avoid arguments likely to generate stressful reactions. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. I approach relationships with an open-hearted desire to connect with another person. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I decide whether to take an expensive vacation after asking myself if it will add joy to my life. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. I am drawn to people who challenge my intellect. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. When my intuition and logic are in conflict, I rely on logic. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

13. I pay close attention when I “know” something “in my bones” or when I experience chills or other body signals for no apparent physiological reason.

4 3 2 1

14. I reject conclusions of others when they are not supported by facts.

4 3 2 1

15. I decide whether to take an expensive vacation after asking myself if I can afford it.

4 3 2 1

16. I get creative ideas from dreams, hunches, or other unexpected sources.

4 3 2 1

For every term in *both* columns below, insert a number using the following key:

4 = very strong influence on how I behave

3 = strong influence on how I behave

2 = moderate influence on how I behave

1 = negligible influence on how I behave

17. _____ Concepts

26. _____ Emotions

18. _____ Empathy

27. _____ Logic

19. _____ Intuition

28. _____ Reasoning

20. _____ Understanding

29. _____ Appreciating

21. _____ Facts

30. _____ Instincts

22. _____ Compassion

31. _____ Objectivity

23. _____ Practical

32. _____ Experimental

24. _____ Passionate

33. _____ Analytical

25. _____ Gut Feelings

34. _____ Rationality

Scoring

Transfer the numbers you circled and inserted from the previous pages in the appropriate spaces below. Then, add the numbers in each column.

(Note: Numbers do not follow in sequence.)

1. _____	3. _____
2. _____	5. _____
4. _____	6. _____
7. _____	8. _____
11. _____	9. _____
12. _____	10. _____
14. _____	13. _____
15. _____	16. _____
17. _____	26. _____
27. _____	18. _____
28. _____	19. _____
20. _____	29. _____
21. _____	30. _____
31. _____	22. _____
23. _____	32. _____
33. _____	24. _____
34. _____	25. _____
Total _____	Total _____

= Cognitive Preference

= Emotional Preference

Refer to the chart on the next page to guide you in interpreting your scoring.

		Cognitive Reasoning	
		LOW	HIGH
Emotional Involvement	HIGH	I Seeks Precedents and Guidance from Others, Acts Dramatically	II Experimental and Creative, Personal and Empathic
	LOW	III Seeks Routines, Neglects Searching Inquiry	IV Seeks Factual Evidence, Logic and Objectivity, Impersonal

Chart: Cognitive and Emotional Thinking

Scores above 50 reflect an area of highly developed thinking preference.

Scores below 35 suggest an area for further thinking-skill development.

Scores between 35 and 50 reflect an area of moderately developed thinking preference.

The intent of your *Thinking Preference Profile* is to suggest where to focus your energy to further develop your capacity for clear, creative thinking. The parts that follow will guide you in this pursuit.

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PREVIEW

P A R T

2

Generating Alternative Ideas

“*In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s there are few.*”

—Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*

PREVIEW

Sparking Your Creative Imagination

Creativity breaks existing patterns to clear space for original thinking geared toward achieving valued outcomes. Whether the desired outcome is a product, services, research, humor, advertising copy, a strategic business plan, presentations, or professional and personal relationships, exercising your creativity will help you break free of the usual, standard ways of thinking and move toward new ideas and opportunities.

How can you think in ways that generate creative transformational possibilities? This section will cover five techniques for sparking your creative imagination:

- **Constraints**
- **“What If” Scenarios**
- **Dialectic Thinking**
- **Dramatization**
- **Reframing**

Each of these techniques has its place in the creative process, depending on the problem or issue to be explored. What they all have in common is that they stimulate your imagination to develop new ways of resolving the problem.

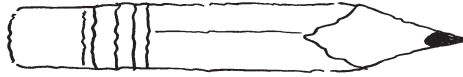
Constraints

A constraint imposes *tension* between limitation and possibility that stimulates your imagination to resolve the tension.

Newspaper and magazine writers commonly deal with a space constraint. Initially, writers may insist they cannot be constrained to a specific word count, that they cannot cover the subject in less space. But for seasoned writers, the tension imposed by the space constraint invariably stimulates deeper thought, richer expression, or clearer phrasing as a way of resolving that tension.

Another type of constraint, suggested by Edward de Bono, one of the world’s foremost authorities on creative thinking, uses randomly selected words as a creative stimulus. His hypothesis: “Any two inputs cannot remain separate to the human mind. No matter how unconnected, they will establish some sort of link.”

Even if you doubt the validity of de Bono’s theory, connect a real issue with a randomly chosen word to see if it stimulates fresh, useful ideas. Try the following “Constraints” exercise.



ESTABLISH A LINK

Identify a problem of interest to you using a minimum of words, such as college tuition, car safety, affordable housing, marital intimacy, information overload, career advancement.

Your issue: _____

Open a dictionary and record the 13th word on the opened page. Or, for this exercise, choose one of the following words selected at random: salmon, pliers, microphone, charter, jostle, pelvic, sincere, crown, slither, decipher.

Your word: _____

Let your mind freely connect your issue and the arbitrarily selected word. Without judgment, write your connections in the following spaces.

For example, if my *issue* was “car safety” and my random *word* was “charter,” my connections might be:

- Charter a bus to pick up and deliver persons too drunk to drive
- Charter a citizen’s club whose members share the common interest of alerting government officials to post traffic speed signs and install speed bumps
- Encourage all students at charter schools to enroll in driver education courses

Just as irritants stimulate an oyster’s pearl-producing activity, constraints animate creativity. They open fresh vistas, break worn patterns, and help you escape cliché thinking.

“What If” Questions

The fundamental issue for innovators is adding value. But such a serious intent taps logic more than it stimulates imagination. That’s where “what if” questions come in: They open you to playful possibilities. Creativity blossoms in the light of playfulness.

Alex Osborn, co-founder of one of the world’s largest ad agencies, suggested that child-like questions give you access to your inherent creativity. Applying logic can come later when it is time to shape the ideas in practical ways that add value.

For now, just consider all the “what if” questions you could ask if you needed to brainstorm new product ideas. Begin by asking, “What if this product were ...” and fill in the blank with these possibilities:

- Larger or smaller?
- Reversed?
- Vocal?
- Combined or split?
- Illuminated?
- Softened or hardened?
- Heavier or lighter?
- Customized?
- Electrified?
- Networked?
- Insulated?
- Liquefied?
- Colder or warmer?
- More colorful or less colorful?
- Looser or tighter?
- More fragrant or less fragrant?
- Stationary or mobile?
- Priced lower or priced higher?
- Guaranteed?
- Thinner or thicker?

CASE STUDY: NEW PRODUCTS FROM “WHAT IF” QUESTIONS

The following examples show how asking “what if” questions led two major companies to expand their product lines.

Adhesive bandage strips were, for decades, designed to be unobtrusive—presumably to keep others from noticing that wearers had clumsily cut themselves. But Johnson & Johnson started asking *what if* bandages were more colorful and eye-catching? As a result, the company opened a new market with garish colors festooned with cartoon characters. Children loved these bandages and wore them with pride.

Cassette tape players were not easily portable when Sony wanted to expand its market share. A senior manager asked, “*What if* we made these devices much smaller?” He tossed a small block of wood on a table and told a design group, “Make it this size.” (He combined *what if* thinking with a *constraint*.) The resultant product incorporated headphones and miniaturized electronics, culminating in the first Walkman® portable stereo.

In what way would you like to improve the way you do business? Brainstorm “what if” questions that would get you thinking in new ways. Write the possibilities below, no matter how trivial or unworkable they might seem right now.

“What if” question: _____

Resulting possibilities: _____

“What if” question: _____

Resulting possibilities: _____

“What if” question: _____

Resulting possibilities: _____

Dialectic Thinking

F. Scott Fitzgerald observed: “The mark of a developed intellect is that it can accommodate two contradictory ideas at the same time.” Surely he was speaking about dialectic thinking!

The dictionary describes dialectic thinking as juxtaposing contradictory ideas and seeking to resolve their conflicts. Think of bringing together opposites and overcoming what appear to be irreconcilable differences.

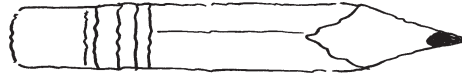
It is in the resolving of the conflicts that creativity happens. Indeed, dialectic thinking turns rationality on its head! To integrate opposites requires moving from linear logic (sequential reasoning) to more creative thinking.

Dialectic thinking involves three steps:

1. A premise is presented: the thesis
2. An opposing premise is identified: the antithesis
3. The effort to reconcile both premises—the synthesis—stimulates creative ideas

Articulating and working through these three steps forces you to give adequate thought to alternative ideas. Otherwise, it is too easy to compromise too quickly. To embrace both the belief you hold (the synthesis) and its opposite (the antithesis), you have to break your current mind-set. And doing that is what often ignites unexpected insights.

The dialectic thinking tool makes your assumptions explicit. Then you and others can openly judge the soundness of your conclusions. Now exercise your dialectic thinking skills in the following scenario to check your conclusions and explore new ideas.



MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

A corporate president considers launching an awards banquet to recognize outstanding performers. She asks your opinion about initiating such an annual event.

Let's examine this request using the step-by-step dialectic thinking tool. The first step is presenting the *thesis*: A public awards ceremony, particularly involving financial incentives, will help motivate employees to be more productive.

The second step is identifying the *antithesis*: Changing our own behavior is exceedingly difficult; hoping to change the performance behavior of others is at best a temporary fix.

The third step is reconciling both these premises to develop the *synthesis*. Write below your synthesis that integrates the intent of the president's thesis with the difficulty identified in the antithesis.

Author's suggestions:

Possible synthesis: Everyone is innately motivated. The challenge is not to design events to motivate others but to create environments that support individuals and teams in doing their best work.

Reflecting on this synthesis stimulates these new ideas and possibilities:

- Initiating a corporate fellowship or sabbatical program is likely to support motivation. Such a program would offer outstanding performers the opportunity to lead challenging projects of their own choosing for a specific time period with adequate resources.
- A team could take an idea they developed and be supported in creating a new enterprise in which these innovative performers and the company would jointly retain stock options.

Dramatization

From the time we were children, we have engaged in role-playing in one form or another, and it is a common teaching tool in adult training seminars. Dramatization is a form of role-playing developed by Jacob Moreno, widely recognized as the father of psychodrama.

Dramatization gives a “voice” to each element of a problem or potential opportunity as individuals play the parts of people and inanimate objects. The role-playing draws out perspectives that might be missed in standard impersonal analysis.

What makes dramatization more than just playing around?

- Using role-playing to generate alternatives moves beyond *ideation* into the practical arena of *doing*. For example, if you think an apology is appropriate, acting out the apologizing to a real person is a skill-building experience. Role-playing narrows the gap between a hypothetical situation and a real-life interaction.
- Role-playing offers direct, immediate feedback. It brings into play not just *mental* reactions, but also how others *feel* about how you interact with them. Role-playing is a learning vehicle for emotional skills.
- Dramatization presents multiple perspectives that often trigger fresh thinking.

CASE STUDY: ELEVATOR BLUES

A newly renovated 20-story office building was quickly leased in downtown Philadelphia. But as the building filled, complaints mounted. People were annoyed waiting in the lobby for elevators. The cost of constructing new elevator shafts was prohibitive. What to do?

A problem-solving meeting using *dramatization* was convened with three role players—a typical person waiting in the lobby, the “lobby” itself, and an “elevator.” Here’s the dialogue the role-players improvised.

Elevator: *“What’s all the fuss? I knock myself out picking up passengers. I don’t take breaks. Instead of appreciation, people spill coffee on my new floor. And does everyone have to arrive during the same peak hours?”*

Passenger: *“What if some of you elevators were to stop only on alternate floors? That way you would cut your travel time, and we could easily walk down one flight of stairs.”*

Elevator: *“That’s not fair to handicapped people.”*

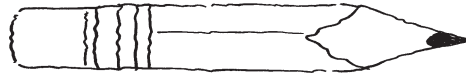
Lobby: *“I’m disgusted with this conversation. Why don’t you just come out and say it—you hate me. People want to get away from me as fast as they can.”*

Passenger: *“You are rather drab. Can’t you spruce up your appearance?”*

Lobby: *“Yes. New carpeting would help. How about piping in music? A fish tank would add to my environment.”*

Elevator: *“I’ve got it! Let’s install large mirrors in the lobby.”*

The dialogue could continue, but you get the idea. From the day the mirrors were actually installed in the lobby, no complaints about elevator delays were ever voiced again.

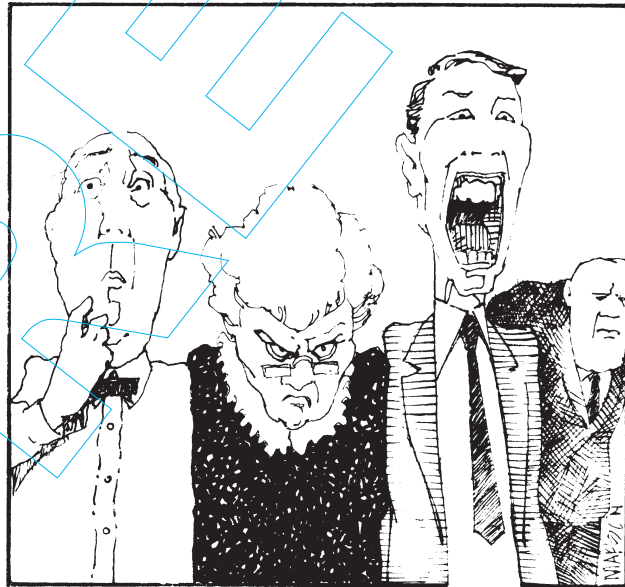


DRAMATIZE YOUR PROBLEM

Now it is your turn. Using a real problem or concern, identify involved people and relevant objects. Invite co-workers or friends to play certain roles. Do not rehearse; creativity is stimulated by spontaneity. Encourage the players to bounce off one another's dialogue.

The problem I will dramatize: _____

The roles to be played out (individuals or objects): _____



Reframing

Another tool for stimulating creative possibilities is to reframe conventional wisdom by asking yourself: “If I didn’t accept the view of reality imposed by others, how else could I define it?” In other words, how could I look at the problem a different way than the way others would have me look at it?

A photo snapshot includes both what is recorded on film and how the photographer framed the picture. Likewise, reality for people is not the actual truth detached from any context. It is the understanding in the minds and hearts of those who are perceiving.

The same round of golf, for example, has a different reality to the professional player than to the caddy. As another example, you may give your employee a gift certificate to a fine restaurant because you value his contributions to the team. But he may reframe your gift giving as an attempt to “butter him up” to work overtime in the coming weeks.

The following historical example illustrates how, through reframing, a different reality was created—more in harmony with your goals and values.

A French army commander received orders to quell riots in Paris before the 1789 Revolution. He was directed to disperse crowds by shooting unarmed protesters if necessary. As his soldiers leveled their rifles, the commander shouted to an angry crowd: “Mesdames et monsieurs, I have orders to fire at the rabble (*canaille*). But, as I see a great number of honest, respectable citizens before me, I request that these citizens leave so I can safely shoot the rabble.” The square emptied in a few minutes.

Reframing also connects with incremental and transformational thinking. For example, in the historical scenario above, opposing hostility with greater hostility would have been *incremental* reasoning—more of the same. Instead, the army commander *transformed* the situation, opening up the possibility for a new solution to emerge.

By reframing the problem at hand, you open your mind to a new solution more in tune with your goals, values, and capabilities.

Tapping into Your Inner Wisdom

Inner wisdom works at a level below the conscious mind. This inner knowing expresses itself as thoughts and feelings (intuition), body sensations (focusing), and dream symbols. In general, relaxation, minimal distraction, released expectations, and a nonjudgmental attitude all help you tap into your inner wisdom.

Intuition

Surely you can recall times when an unexpected insight darted into your awareness, hinting at a direction for you to take. Or, conversely, perhaps you remember when you blamed yourself with: “I *knew* I shouldn’t have done that; I ran right through the warning signals.” That direct, immediate, holistic inner wisdom is what we identify as intuitive capacity. Everyone has it.

Consider the case of a CEO, who discounted her intuition about an open executive-level position. One candidate, Tom, looked promising on paper and was articulate at the job interview. Even though a little intuitive voice told the CEO that Tom wasn’t a leader, logic convinced her otherwise. After all, what better evidence of leadership was there than Tom’s serving as an army major? But the CEO’s gut turned out to be better attuned than her brain. Fortunately, in time, she found a mutually satisfying match by transferring Tom to a technical staff position.

Although intuition may be on target, its validity cannot be proved definitively. In the example of Tom’s inadequate leadership, other factors may have influenced his poor performance at the new job. Perhaps the CEO didn’t provide enough training or support, or maybe Tom got depressed listening to his family’s unrelenting complaints about being uprooted to another city.

Still, intuition is a powerful tool that stimulates creative possibilities. Your intuitive sense can give you clues to examine and directions to explore.

Getting into a state of gentle receptivity will help you attune to the guidance your intuition offers. Quiet your everyday mind-chatter with deep relaxation. Allow yourself to “let go” and be attentive to your subtle intuitive voice.

Focusing

Developed by University of Chicago psychologist, philosopher, and author Eugene Gendlin, *focusing* is an effective tool for eliciting inner wisdom that might otherwise be inaccessible. The technique depends on being sensitive to subtle body-feeling messages.

Here's an abbreviated scenario adapted from Gendlin's book, *Focusing*, to illustrate how focusing works.

Fred, a sales executive, feels a constant tightness in his stomach (his body-feeling message). Company sales have been declining and Fred's reorganization plan was turned down by his manager. Fred believes his boss doesn't respect him or his ideas.

Take Fred's role, or any problem you are facing, and experiment with the following focusing steps:

1. **Clear your mind.** See what comes into your consciousness when you ask: How am I feeling right now? What about this issue keeps me from feeling wonderful? What else? Anything else?
2. **Sense the totality.** Ask: What does the whole situation or problem feel like? Screen out demeaning self-lectures. Focus on the single feeling that most touches everything that seems awry or off.
3. **Identify a label or handle.** See if you can find words that get to the heart of the problem—words that tell you: “Yes! That's what it is all about.”
4. **Check your label.** Is this really the crux of the issue? If it is, you will sense a release (in Fred's case, a release of the knots in his stomach). If not, consider another round.

Let's see how sales manager Fred might have dealt with his issue at each step in the focusing process.

Fred is worried about his career and angry with his boss. He is also angry with himself for not presenting his plan with more compelling logic. As Fred probes more deeply, he feels a lack of self-confidence and chooses the label “insecure.” The knots in his stomach seem to be related to sadness, covered over by anger, that at his age, work is still such a struggle, and he feels so vulnerable.

Focusing helps you direct your attention to identifying what really matters and understanding what needs to be addressed.

Dream Processing

The expression, “Let’s sleep on it,” reflects the nocturnal process that reorganizes information in ways that can be illuminating. Thus, *dream processing* involves decoding symbolic information found in your dreams and nightmares.

Nobel prize physicist Niels Bohr, after dreaming of horses racing within marked lanes, suddenly grasped what was to be his basic thesis of atomic structure: Electrons must remain in fixed orbits around the nuclei of atoms.

Inventor Elias Howe, stymied and frustrated with his inadequate design for a sewing machine, had a dream. Cannibals captured and started boiling him in preparation for dinner. Each time he tried to escape from the bubbling cauldron, the natives poked him back with sharp spears—each oddly fashioned with a hole near the point. Howe awoke in a sweat with a rush of insight. He “knew” that the thread transport needle of his sewing machine needed a pierced hole not at the blunt end—where it was located during centuries of hand sewing—but at the sharp point. The sewing machine needle was born!

Dreams often have multiple messages. Howe, for example, could have felt sharp prodding because he was in “hot water” with investors—which, indeed, was the case.

Einstein dramatized the power of dreams for problem solving when he said that his entire scientific career was a meditation on his dream of sledding down a hill under a star-filled sky, gaining momentum until he reached the speed of light.

Research concludes that everyone, unless sedated with pills or alcohol, experiences the rapid eye movement that accompanies dreaming. About 20% of total sleep time every night is spent in a dream state. This adds up to four years of the average person’s life span.

To gain insights from dreaming, the first challenge is remembering. Try the following strategies:

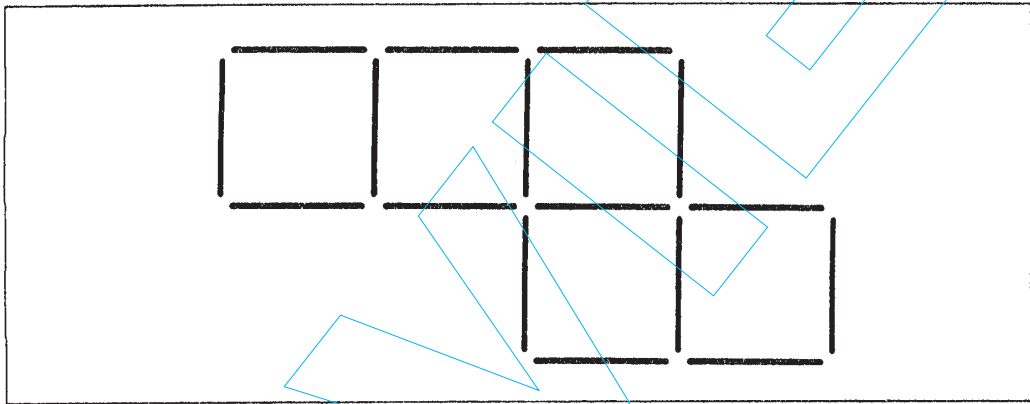
- Set the intention to recall your dreams
- Just before falling asleep, program your unconscious with a specific issue for it to tackle
- Place pen and paper or a recording device at your bedside

Dreaming is particularly effective in breaking new ground because dreams do not heed cultural constraints or any need to be logical. You are free to be creative without concern for propriety or worry about looking ridiculous.

Using Analytical Reasoning

Analytical reasoning is a useful tool for checking the validity of tentative conclusions and stimulating further creative thinking. Also called critical thinking, it uses inductive and deductive reasoning to draw useful conclusions from limited information.

Before examining everyday, practical, ambiguous issues that permeate our work and personal lives, let's look at the rare problem that has only one correct solution.



This diagram shows five equal squares made by laying out matchsticks of equal length. Your task is to move just two sticks to new locations and reduce the number of squares from five to four, each the same size as the original squares. Use all matchsticks as sides of squares. Do not discard any sticks or place any on top of or next to other matchsticks. This problem will be solved when—by moving only two sticks—you have constructed four squares using all matchsticks as sides of complete squares.

Try it! You may attempt a trial-and-error approach, but it is rarely successful. Instead, creative imagination and analytical reasoning are the dual partners that will release you from this puzzle's perceptual trap.

Tap into your intuition, a function of your creative imagination, for this clue: Count the sticks—16. Logical analysis, then, should trigger your solution strategy. To use the 16 sticks in just four squares, all four squares must be freestanding. That is, they can touch each other only at the corners.

Try the four-freestanding-squares strategy before checking the key at the end of this book. Which two sticks must be moved?

Inductive Reasoning

When examining all data would be impossible or impractical, *inductive reasoning* leads to a generalized conclusion from particular instances. You start with evidence about *some* members of a class or category. This becomes the basis for your conclusion or theory about *all* members of that class.

Because extrapolating from a limited sample to reach a general conclusion involves uncertainty, inductive reasoning generates only hypotheses or working assumptions. If additional information continues to support your predicted pattern, it strengthens the hypothesis. But even one well-founded contradiction suggests the need to modify or develop a new theory. The march of science is recorded in the rejection of one theory (such as assuming electricity to be a fluid) and the creation of another that better explains new evidence.

People with a vested interest in theories-in-vogue may intentionally avoid disconfirming evidence. A 17th-century example was the refusal of clerics to look through Galileo's new telescope because it might reveal the truth that the earth is not the center of our solar system.

Example of Inductive Reasoning

In the organizational world, an inductive claim could be: Because managers Mario, Susan, and Dao have private offices, it follows that all managers in similar positions have private offices.

Because the reasoning moves to a generalization about all managers, the conclusion has been reached inductively. The evidence—three managers have private offices—contributes to a level of probability that the hypothesis is true. With each new supporting fact, the conclusion gains credibility. But even one valid contradictory case can refute a generalization. Thus, in this example it would be advisable to check the work area of more than three managers before making a claim about all managers.

To evaluate the credibility of any conclusion drawn using inductive reasoning, consider:

Sample Size—The larger the number of people or events studied, the more confidence you will have in the conclusion. Adequate sample size can be determined statistically.

Selection Criteria—Are the people or events *representative* of the whole class under study? Were they chosen *randomly*? Does the sample have the same *mix proportions* as the population under study regarding relevant variables such as gender, race, income level, health, locale, and education?

Researcher Bias—Are the researchers likely to be influenced in favor of or in opposition to a particular outcome? Has relevant information been ignored or discounted? Does the physical presence of the researchers distort what they are observing?

Cause-Effect Relationship—The possibility of a relationship masquerading as causal is an important aspect of critical thinking. Explore the likelihood of a particular event *causing* an observed result.

For example:

- *Does shoe size predict intelligence?* Very low probability
- *Does the content of your refrigerator predict stress level?* Low probability
- *Does a bolt of lightning cause the thunder that follows some seconds later?* Very high probability (experimental evidence confirms that lightning heats the air through which it passes, creating a sudden expansion that generates sound waves).

Even a strong correlation does not ensure a causal link. A fascinating and amusing study once found support for the claim that babies were brought to mothers by storks—at least Swedish babies. A correlation of 0.9 (about as close to a perfect 1.0 as is feasible) was shown to exist over a period of years between the number of stork nests in Stockholm and babies born there! As noted earlier, inductive reasoning generates only hypotheses!

Deductive Reasoning

Just the opposite of induction, *deduction* takes a general statement that makes a claim and applies it to one or more specific situations, events, or people. The purpose of deductive reasoning is to draw reasonable inferences from available information.

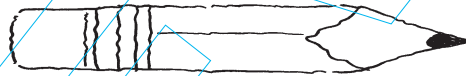
Example of Deductive Reasoning

Because all managers have private offices, it follows that Pablo, newly promoted to a managerial position, should be assigned a private office.

A good way to identify deductive reasoning is to note movement from *general* to *specific*—in the example, from “all managers” to “Pablo.”

When considering the validity of deductive logic, explore the likelihood that the general principle or policy under consideration helps create a sound basis for future decisions that will be based on it.

For example, in considering managerial work areas, do some managers need privacy while others need to better interface with production? How does the policy affect use of home offices? Does the policy send a signal that the more responsibility you gain in this organization, the more cloistered or aloof you are expected to become?



EVALUATE THE POLICY DECISION

You have been asked to serve on a committee to make recommendations that will improve the quality of newly hired employees. Your committee reaches the following conclusion: All job candidates should be evaluated on how well they match the attitudes and skills of the organization’s most effective employees.

The committee believes this policy will result in better performance and less turnover. In your judgment, is this policy recommendation sound and likely to serve corporate needs? Why or why not?

Author's suggestions:

Using deductive reasoning—moving from a general statement to its specific application—let's examine whether the recommended policy is appropriate to the situation.

Proposal Strengths

- The organization would review patterns, perhaps for the first time, that contribute to effective job performance
- Teamwork might be fostered among employees who have similar attitudes

Proposal Weaknesses

- This type of screening might unfairly discriminate and might even lead to litigation by rejected job applicants
- Workforce homogeneity might generate minimal disagreement, but fail to spark the creative ideas that emerge when people with diverse backgrounds respectfully confront one another
- Employees who currently are most productive might not be the best role models if circumstances were to change radically

We could take an either/or or accept/reject approach to this committee's findings, but a more productive position would be to consider what aspects of the study have merit. For example, the committee's recommendations might not serve corporate hiring needs in their present form. But compiling a list of effective attitudes and skills, periodically updated, could be useful in designing employee training programs.

Understanding Systems Thinking

A special type of thinking helps you understand how purposeful systems function. *Systems thinking* helps you focus on dynamic wholes and how components interact. Then when problems occur you can *change the thinking* that caused the problems in the first place. Again, as in the previous sections, the aim is to generate alternatives.

Clearly, systems thinking is helpful to engineers designing manufacturing plants for pharmaceuticals, power generation, or water purification. But some appreciation of systems thinking is helpful to anyone with organizational responsibilities.

The actions you take, such as outsourcing subassemblies or initiating new procedures, are never isolated. When you change one variable, you effect a change elsewhere in the system. Such changes will not always be apparent to you because they might be local or distant, immediate or delayed.

The following terms are useful in understanding how systems function to improve performance of individuals, teams, and organizations.

- **System.** A network of interacting elements that work together to carry out an objective, purpose, or intention
- **Input.** People—with their ideas, reasoning skills and talents—plus money, material, equipment, information, work space, and such environmental resources as clean air, water, the Internet, roads, and power
- **Processing Capacity.** The system's ability to transform inputs to desired products, services, and knowledge
- **Output.** What the system delivers that becomes the input to other systems or that is recycled to the environment
- **Feedback.** Information about how well outputs match intentions
- **Control.** The system's ability to sense deviations from desired output and to act on this feedback to minimize such digressions.

To see how these system elements function and how they could affect your responsibilities, consider the following case study.

CASE STUDY: SERVING THE CUSTOMER

At Cosmo Electronics, sales drifted steadily lower during the past year. Happily, this quarter, sales are rebounding. Marketing vice president Mark attributes the turnaround to advertising and his new program of financial incentives for sales personnel. To sustain recent rising sales, Mark asked marketing analyst Ann to check future purchase plans of Cosmo's best customers. Ann discovered widespread discontent with late deliveries and inconsistent quality. Some annoyed customers had already placed orders with Cosmo's competitors. Mark responded by naming Ann to the new position of customer services coordinator. Employee reaction (during private water-cooler conversations) was: "Here we go again."

If you were a consultant to Cosmo Electronics' president, what counsel would you offer? Why?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

To gain perspective, let's examine system elements relevant to this case.

- **Input.** For Cosmo Electronics, relevant inputs are customer orders, staff skills, raw materials, and financial investment. Management failed to learn why—over a 12-month period—orders had been declining. They should have been asking: How much was due to an economic downturn, how much to customer dissatisfaction, how much to inadequate promotion?
- **Processing capacity.** This was Cosmo's most critical system element. Before investing in advertising and offering financial incentives to sales personnel, management needed to ensure the system had adequate capacity to process orders with consistent quality, timely delivery, and first-rate customer support. Salespeople quoting unrealistic delivery dates and unrealistic special-design options to gain sales-incentive rewards could have further exacerbated the company's problems.
- **Output, feedback, and control.** Feedback relates desired output to actual output so that appropriate control can ensure on-target processing. But honest feedback can be gained only by building trust and minimizing employee vulnerability. When Cosmo personnel said "Here we go again" only privately, they deprived management of the thinking of those most knowledgeable about what is awry in the system. If incentives are used, they should be based on profits, not sales, and should cover all employees whose feedback counts. Otherwise, insights are lost, energy is withdrawn, and employee focus shifts to self-protection.

Systems Thinking Lessons

The previous customer service case study illustrates the importance of thinking with a whole-picture perspective, covered in Part 1, and of considering the interaction among system components to generate alternative solutions. Review the following lessons about systems thinking:

Systems vs. Linear Thinking. Addressing a problem with sequential, straight-line thinking, such as “Sales are down; promote sales,” is likely to engender future concerns more challenging than the short-term dilemma it solves.

Collaborative Inquiry. Systems problems are most productively addressed in dialogue with people of diverse perspectives, no matter what their organizational position—including key customers and suppliers. Aim at uncovering any unintended consequences of implementing current thinking.

Introspection. When problems that affect you escalate or recur (“Here we go again”), assume *you* are part of the problem.



Sharing Perspectives with Others

Thomas Jefferson once observed: “Too many are afflicted with impatience for any logic that is not their own.” But sharing perspectives with others can enrich clear thinking of the issue and potential alternatives. The idea is not to debate; thinking with others is mutual inquiry, a conversation, a dialogue without ego. The goal is to bring together multiple viewpoints into a coherent whole.

Multiple views are helpful when participants:

- Have a common intention and understanding of the issue or problem to be addressed
- Think independently about feasible solutions before sharing ideas
- Trust and respect one another—so that each contribution is expressed without a hidden agenda
- Seek the best thinking without creating a competitive win/lose environment
- Do not get attached to or identified with specific outcomes, but instead, remain open to fresh ideas

Dialogue is a strategy for thinking together creatively. It requires remaining curious, tuning in to your inner wisdom and the wisdom of others, and staying open to possibility. The assumption throughout the dialogue should be that each person possesses some insight and that bringing these together will allow a fuller picture to be revealed.

Dialogue for Organization Development

Group dialogue gained acceptance as an organization development tool at the end of World War II with the advent of two communication laboratory experiments—Tavistock Study Group in England and National Training Laboratory (NTL) in the United States. The programs were called T-groups, sensitivity training, and laboratory learning. Initially they were aimed at business executives interested in leadership and personal growth. At the training labs, participants typically spent 10 days together in an isolated setting without much structure or a preplanned agenda. Their central message remains applicable today:

- If you speak candidly without equivocation and if you take responsibility for the consequences of choices you make, you will be a more effective leader
- Thinking with others depends on gaining an understanding of how your behavior is seen by them
- What you learn in the laboratory will flow primarily from experiences you share with other participants

Charles Handy, professor at the London School of Business, tells of his experience at one of the early NTL programs in the United States.

I was nervous, apprehensive, and on my best behavior—concealing my alarm to learn that the entire first week would be unstructured—no agenda, no leader, no timetable. I was an outsider from abroad and decided to keep quiet and watch the others discuss a plan. At one point, someone suggested that we check impressions. This was the instruction:

“Put your name on a piece of paper and pass it around. We each will write a word or phrase describing how we see you. When all the papers have gone around, we will each unfold our own and find the comments.”

I had nothing to lose. I had said nothing and expected to get back an empty sheet of paper. But I had a full complement of comments: “Snob, Patronizing, Stuck Up, Unapproachable, Superior,” and more. I realized they had dumped all their stereotypes of the British onto me. I jumped to my feet, red-faced and furious, stung into speech ending with: “... and, I’m not even British. I’m Irish.” They laughed. I forgave them. It was me speaking, not a silent stereotype.

Notice how people tend to project onto others impressions based on experience and expectation. Note also how forgiving and cooperative people are when you reveal who you really are and allow yourself to be vulnerable.

Four Principles for Group Dialogue

Encouraging people to feel safe enough to be candid is a leadership challenge. Creating an environment that supports authenticity brings out the most productive thinking because people say what they know and how they feel. They don't feel the need to hide behind roles. Follow these operating principles to help promote a productive group dialogue:

Clarify Ground Rules and a Common Purpose

When you convene a dialogue group, identify common interests worthy of the considerable time required to think together effectively. The purpose may be strategic issues at work, or issues that concern everyone such as:

- How can we create an environment that better supports personal and professional renewal?
- What assumptions are we making that limit performance and satisfaction?

Be Fully Present to Your Direct Experience

Presence requires sensitive self-awareness and attuning to what is happening in the moment. You detract from your presence when you try to impress others; avoid feelings, including your own; and rush to fill what you perceive to be an awkward silence.

Ask yourself, Do I allow myself to say what's true for me:

- Without concern for what impression I am making?
- Without feeling the need for mental rehearsing?
- Without assurance from others that I am "right"?

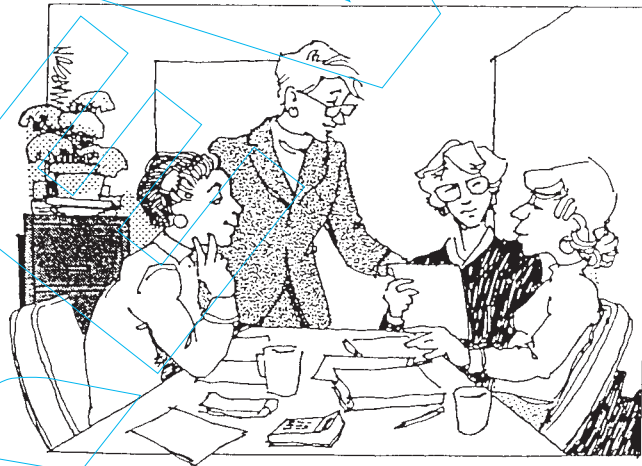
Listen with a “Third Ear”

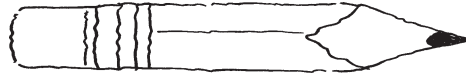
Consider the advice of management pioneer Elton Mayo: “Listen to what others want to say, listen to what they do not want to say, and listen to what they cannot say without support.”

Don’t distract yourself with expectation, judgment, or thinking about a rebuttal. Listen with the attitude that you don’t have to prepare any response. When you listen with the sole intent of understanding what is and isn’t being said, you non-verbally communicate respect for the speaker, respect that paves the way for productive collaboration.

See Yourself in the Experience of Others

As much as you are willing to expose your vulnerabilities, others are likely to see some of their own issues in your experience. And, when others speak, their experience may serve as a mirror to reflect and clarify your own issues and creative possibilities.





GATHER THE GROUP'S INSIGHTS

Answer the following questions to identify how you would apply the four operating principles for group dialogue to a real issue on which you want to gain further insight.

Who else is involved in the issue and should be invited to participate in thinking together?

What is the common purpose that will motivate participants' desire to draw out the group's best thinking?

What ground rules will you want to adopt to ensure disclosure of sensitive information?

What traps do you need to avoid? Bias based on parochial interests? Desire to "look good"? Fear of uncertainty? List the traps that apply to your situation.

How can you create a safe meeting environment, free of distraction, that supports participants in listening to each other with full attention?
