

Information Sheet - Institute of Welfare

Lateral Thinking

Lateral thinking, or 'thinking outside the box' helps to improve your ability to think creatively about problems. Most of the great discoveries occurred when people made obscure connections in their mind with a problem and asked 'what if...?' To follow this approach in solving a problem, or coming up with a good idea, you need to examine the problem from a different point of view; avoid trying to be correct all the time, and focus on being wrong.

Lateral thinking was conceived by Edward De Bono in the 1960s. One of his techniques involves random stimulation, where you relate a problem to completely random information to see what the result is. For example, open a random page in a dictionary, randomly point at an entry and make connections.

Another technique is reversal. You simply consider the problem at hand, and then consider the opposite; or just reverse something about it such as, you want to go on holiday this summer, but do not know where. Reverse the issue: where is the worst place you can go and where would you go if it was winter?

Another of de Bono's techniques is 'stepping stone' and involves taking advantage of other people's discarded ideas - discarded because they 'won't work', or are illogical or ill-thought out. The stepping stone method records these ideas, as they may help to point the way to a better idea, and eventually to the solution to the problem. This technique can be performed alone, or in a group as part of brainstorming.

Some of the reasoning behind lateral thinking is the fact that,

"You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper."

This means that it may be more useful to change direction. So, lateral thinking is about changing concepts and perceptions. In life we assume certain perceptions, concepts and boundaries. Lateral thinking is the perception part of thinking. The part where we organise the external world into pieces we can 'process'.

The brain has the mathematical need to move across patterns. The tools and processes of lateral thinking include understanding and self-organising information systems, and is the tool used to achieve 'lateral' movement.

Self-organising systems need to escape the local optimum and move towards the global optimum. The provocation technique of lateral thinking will help that change to occur. It also defines the mathematical need for creativity, the aspect that allows for successful lateral thinking.

Institute of Welfare, PO Box 5570, Stourbridge, DY8 9BA.
Tel: 0800 0 32 37 25
info@instituteofwelfare.co.uk
www.instituteofwelfare.co.uk
Company Limited by Guarantee No. 03924280
Registered Charity No. 1144623

August 2012