

- The two preceding chapters have been concerned with two fundamental aspects of the lateral thinking process:
- The deliberate generation of alternative ways of looking at things.
 - The challenging of assumptions.

In themselves these processes are not far removed from ordinary vertical thinking. What is different is the 'unreasonable' way in which the processes are applied and the purpose behind the application. Lateral thinking is concerned not with development but with restructuring.

Both the processes mentioned above have been applied for the purpose of description or analysis of a situation. This could be called backward thinking: this is a matter of looking at something that is there and working it over. Forward thinking involves moving forward. Forward thinking involves building up something new rather than analysing something old. Innovation and creativity involve forward thinking. The distinction between backward and forward thinking is entirely arbitrary. There is no real distinction because one may have to look backward in a new way in order to move forward. A creative description may be just as generative as a creative idea. Both backward thinking and forward thinking are concerned with alteration, with improvement, with bringing about some effect. In practice backward thinking is however more concerned with explaining an effect whereas forward thinking is more concerned with bringing about an effect.

Before going on to consider innovation it is necessary to consider an aspect of thinking that applies much more to forward thinking than to backward thinking. This is the matter of evaluation and suspended judgment.

The purpose of thinking is not to be right but to be effective. Being effective does eventually involve being right but there is a very important difference between the two. Being right means being right all the time. Being effective means being right only at the end.

Vertical thinking involves being right all along. Judgment is exercised at every stage. One is not allowed to take a step that is not right. One is not allowed to accept an arrangement of information that is not right. Vertical thinking is selection by exclusion. Judgment is the method of exclusion and the negative ('no', 'not') is the tool of exclusion.

With lateral thinking one is allowed to be wrong on the way even though one must be right in the end. With lateral thinking one is allowed to use arrangements of information which are invalid in themselves in order to bring about a restructuring that is valid. One may have to move to an untenable position in order to be able to find a tenable position.

In lateral thinking one is not so concerned with the nature of an arrangement of information but with where it can lead one. So instead of judging each arrangement and allowing only those that are valid one suspends judgment until later on. It is not a matter of doing without judgment but of deferring it until later.

As a process lateral thinking is concerned with change not with proof. The emphasis is shifted from the validity of a particular pattern to the usefulness of that pattern in generating new patterns.

There is nothing 'unreasonable' about the other lateral thinking processes described so far but the need to suspend judgment is so fundamentally different from vertical thinking that it is much harder to understand.

Education is soundly based on the *need to be right all the time*. Throughout education one is taught the correct facts, the correct deductions to be made from them and the correct way of making these deductions. One learns to be correct by being made very sensitive to what is incorrect. One learns to apply judgment at every stage and to follow up this judgment with the 'no' label. One learns how to say, 'no', 'this is not so', 'this cannot be so', 'this does not lead to that', 'you are wrong here', 'this would never work', 'there is no reason for that' and so on. This sort of thing is the very essence of vertical thinking and accounts for its great usefulness. The danger lies in the arrogance of the attitude that assumes that vertical thinking is sufficient. It is not. Exclusive emphasis on the need to be right all the time completely shuts out creativity and progress.

The need to be right all the time is the biggest bar there is to new ideas. It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong than to be always right by having no ideas at all.

The need to make use of provocative arrangements of information in order to bring about insight repatterning is dictated by the behaviour of mind as a self-maximizing memory system*. In practice this need is met by delaying judgment. Judgment is suspended during the generative stage of thinking in order to be applied during the selective stage. The nature of the system is such that a wrong idea at some stage can lead to a right one later on. Lee de Forest discovered the immensely useful thermionic valve through following up the erroneous idea that an electric spark altered the behaviour of a gas jet. Marconi succeeded in transmitting wireless waves across the Atlantic ocean through following up the erroneous idea that the waves would follow the curvature of the earth.

The major dangers of the need to be right all the time are as follows:

- Arrogant certainty attends a line of thought which though correct in itself may have started from wrong premises.
- An incorrect idea which would have led on to a correct idea (or useful experimentation) is choked off at too early a stage if it cannot itself be justified.
- It is assumed that being right is enough—an *adequate* arrangement blocks the possibility of a better arrangement.
- The importance attached to being right all the time breeds the inhibiting fear of making mistakes.

Delay in judgment

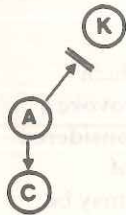
A later chapter deals with the lateral process which involves being wrong on purpose in order to provoke a rearrangement of information. What is being considered here is simply the *delaying of judgment* instead of applying it immediately. In practice judgment may be applied at any of the following stages:

- Judgment as to whether an information area is relevant to the matter under consideration. This precedes the development of any ideas.
- Judgment as to the validity of an idea in one's own internal thinking process. Dismissing such an idea instead of exploring it.
- Judgment as to its correctness before offering an idea to others.
- Judgment of an idea offered by someone else—either in refusing to accept it or in actual condemnation of it.

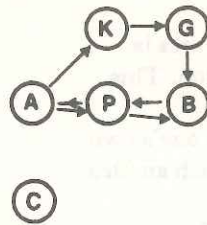
In this regard judgment, evaluation and criticism are regarded as similar processes. Suspension of judgment does not imply suspension of condemnation—it implies suspension of judgment whether the outcome is favourable or otherwise.

The suspension of judgment can have the following effects:

- An idea will survive longer and will breed further ideas.
- Other people will offer ideas which their own judgment would have rejected. Such ideas may be extremely useful to those receiving them.
- The ideas of others can be accepted for their stimulating effect instead of being rejected.
- Ideas which are judged to be wrong within the current frame of reference may survive long enough to show that the frame of reference needs altering.



In the diagram opposite A is the starting point of a problem. In tackling the problem one moves towards K but this idea is unsound and so it is rejected. Instead one moves towards C. But from C one can go nowhere. Had one moved towards K then one could have proceeded from there to G and from G to B which is the solution. Once one had reached B then one would have been able to see the correct path from A through P



Practical application

The principle of suspended judgment has been discussed. The practical application of this principle needs outlining for it is not much use accepting the principle but never applying it. In practice the principle leads to the following behaviour:

- One does not rush to judge or evaluate an idea. One does not regard judgment or evaluation as the most important thing that can be done to an idea. One prefers exploration.
- Some ideas are obviously wrong even when no attempt at judgment is made. In such cases one shifts attention from why it is wrong to how it can be useful.
- Even if one knows that an idea must eventually be thrown out one delays that moment in order to extract

- as much usefulness from the idea as possible.
- Instead of forcing an idea in the direction which judgment indicates one follows along behind it.

A bucket with holes cannot carry much water. One could reject it out of hand. Or one could see how far it could carry how much water. In spite of the holes it may be very useful for bringing about a certain effect.