

INNOVATIVE TRAINING IN THINKING

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Would you please wonder for a few moments about your life and work? Write down some examples of possible areas for improvement in relationships, leadership, creativity, innovation, teamwork, management, communication and trust, effectiveness and efficiency. Have you ever wondered why improvement in these areas is so slow?

It seems to me improvement in all areas is impeded by the way we are trained to think. We are **trained** to think "inside the box". This box is known as critical thinking. It has produced much knowledge of parts of the world around us but it is inconsistent with the integrative way in which nature, our bodies, brains and minds function. In the light of our current knowledge of the world and human behaviour should we not **also** be trained specifically in something like **NEW Integrative Thinking™ (NEW IT)** which is consistent with the integrative way nature, our bodies, brains and minds function?

In contrast to critical thinking, NEW IT is a process of habitually and almost automatically making connections to create a whole new picture rather than habitually and almost automatically breaking down an old picture into its parts.

NEW IT may be thought of as a successor to lateral thinking and using multiple intelligences but, not surprisingly, is fully integrated, not an add-on extra. It is a practical application of brain and mind sciences so is a form of technology but it is human-based rather than machine-based technology. It is a NEW way of thinking which helps us think outside and inside the box and integrate the two as we plan and act. NEW IT can be learned in less time than it takes to learn to drive a car.

Critical Thinking and Its Problems

In educational institutions, at work and even at home we train what I call our **Critical Mind**. We train people to reason in a **disembodied** way as though our minds were symbol manipulators like computers, unconnected with the remainder of our bodies and our environment. We train them to break problems down into parts, to put these parts into rigid categories with shared properties and to manipulate symbols representing these categories. We train them to hypothesise using these rigid categories (thereby excluding all other possibilities) and look for a grain of the "truth" about these categories that is imagined to be "out there" in the real world and to justify that "truth" with propositions expressed in words or mathematical symbols joined together in accordance with the rules of logic. We train them to think in a straight line towards a conclusion. We train them as though the way we justify our thoughts - in logical statements - is the way we think. In short, we train people to think "inside the box". Is it any wonder organisations find difficulty in being innovative?

We dehumanise reasoning.

The effects of this on our lives and work include:-

- * People who are predisposed to be less comfortable with manipulating symbols tend to become alienated from the better justifiers.
- * Power tends to lie with the better justifiers.
- * As justifications become more specialised the difficulty of communicating increases and trust decreases.
- * We tend to become locked into our justifications.
- * We make a habit of being critical first and thinking constructively second or not at all.
- * We continue doing what has worked in the past even when circumstances change.
- * Critical thinking based on different, crude and rigid categorisations often leads to unresolved conflict in groups and organisations. This unresolved conflict can surface later and undermine the group or organisation.
- * Similarly, as individuals we can be left with unresolved internal conflict. This can damage the individual and others.

- All this unresolved conflict leads to cruelty, unhappiness and inefficiency and hinders our creativity and performance as individuals, in groups and in organisations.
- **ALL THIS THINKING ABOUT PARTS STOPS US FROM PLANNING, ORGANISING AND ACTING INNOVATIVELY AND SUSTAINABLY.**

NEW Integrative Thinking (NEW IT)

Training in something like NEW Integrative Thinking™ (NEW IT) by all concerned would overcome these difficulties. We need to train what I call our **Integrative Mind™** of which our **Critical Mind** is a part.

Extensive research in brain and mind sciences in recent years has shown:-

- * Our mind and reasoning are inherently **embodied**, that is, shaped by our bodily interaction within itself and with its physical, social and cultural environment.
- * Most thought is unconscious and much of our reasoning is done when we are not conscious of its being done.
- * Over a lifetime of experiences we develop a number of prototypes in our minds that are reflected in patterns in our brains.
- * It is difficult to change these prototypes so solving novel and complex problems in a creative way usually involves redeploying prototypes from another domain to the novel domain.
- * The more prototypes we have (the broader and deeper our knowledge) and the greater our ability to trigger those prototypes, the easier it is for us to creatively address novel and complex problems.
- * We tend to be simplifiers because we can keep only about four plus or minus one items in our short-term memory while we are working on other information.

NEW Integrative Thinking™ (NEW IT) draws on this and other recent research and starts from the basis that we are **NEW - Wonderers, Narrative creators and Experience managers** not mere manipulators of symbols as critical thinking implies.

The process of NEW IT may be thought of as our wondering about a situation, creating a narrative connecting our wonderings and managing our experiences in acting out our narrative. It involves understanding and learning what our basic human needs and aspects of our human will are, what guides us in balancing those needs and will, clarifying what we have and what we want to set our goal, exploring possible connections when relaxed, arriving at a strategy to negotiate the change from what we have to what we want, devising tactics to advance the strategy, taking bold, assertive and timely action to achieve our goal, reviewing and evaluating our performance.

Advantages of NEW Integrative Thinking™ (NEW IT)

We tend to think integratively when we have a problem and “sleep on it” but we have been trained so much to think “inside the box” that we do not trust the “hunches” that result, particularly those that are “outside the box”.

Imagine what an improvement it would be if you and all the people in your organisation or group were trained in and memorised an integrative thinking process with the features I have described. “Outside the box” thinking and “inside the box” thinking would be integrated and “the box” would disappear. We could humanise our reasoning.

Imagine what it would be like if everyone in your life had this common, comprehensive, holistic and structured basis for communication and trust.

Picture the leader setting directions and motivating people in such a way that all could follow the thinking process the leader used. Picture the quiet introverted creative person being able to explain a new idea in a structured way. Picture a team that “spoke the same language”. Picture a group or organisation with challenge and change all around them that did not have to try to communicate with a multitude of different mindsets developed from a lifelong habit of critical thinking. Picture the manager motivating and coordinating the efforts of the managed when all were trained to plan in broadly the same way.

Becoming an Effective NEW Integrative Thinker (NEW IT) Is Not Difficult

For example, my SOARA (Satisfying, Optimum, Achievable Results Ahead) Process of Integrative Thinking™ involves the learning of a set of aids to memory to help trigger connections in our minds, help us see analogies in unrelated fields and provide a way of self-monitoring our thinking and acting. All these aids to memory are joined together in a meaningful sentence so the Process as a whole can be learned in about the time it takes to learn to drive a car (about twelve hours) and easily remembered. With practice its application can become almost automatic. At all stages of the Process provision is made for learners to record their reflections and possible actions based on those reflections. People can be introduced to the basic concepts of the Process at almost any age. The Process is culturally neutral.

The Process starts with each learner establishing their CAT (Creative Acting and Thinking) Profile by assessing how they applied a set of integrative thinking parameters in some planned activity from their past the results of which were satisfying and led to a successful outcome for them.

Similarly, the learner then establishes their RAT (Random Acting and Thinking) Profile for some planned activity from their past the results of which were unsatisfying and led to an unsuccessful outcome for them.

The learner compares these profiles to understand how they balanced these parameters when successful.

From this basis they begin to clarify what they have and what they want against those same and additional parameters of People, Market, Product, Money and Physical, Social and Cultural Environment.

The Process continues to help the mind redeploy its prototypes in the face of change and uncertainty until a plan is established and implemented, reviewed and evaluated using a number of feed-forward and feedback and other practical techniques based on brain and mind sciences and a lifetime of experience in human development, management, training, business, government and civil society.

With practice, applying the SOARA Process of Integrative Thinking™ becomes a habit that empowers people and makes easier our struggle to achieve successful outcomes on a life-long journey among possibilities. It helps us refine our perceptions, expand our horizons, sense and respond successfully to emerging trends and events. By helping us to make analogies from other domains it brings out and enhances our creativity. By helping us to always consider a comprehensive range of variables it ensures we always take others into account including our customers and stakeholders. NEW IT helps us and our enterprises thrive.

While improving our creativity and performance NEW IT helps us gain a sense of meaning, a sense of belonging and a sense of personal power. This is because NEW IT helps us reconcile our needs and wants and balance and integrate our thoughts, feelings and actions in harmony with our physical, social and cultural environment. Therefore NEW IT helps us work towards innovative, sustainable development and the better linking of life and work.

In this competitive and uncertain world can any of us afford not to know how to integrate our thinking from outside and inside the box?

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Graham Douglas is a pioneer author and consultant in Applied Mind Science in the field of Integrative Thinking™ and originator of Integrative Improvement™-Sustainable Development as if People and Their Physical, Social and Cultural Environments Mattered, the SOARA Process of Integrative Thinking™ and Douglas Integrative Governance 247™ (DIG 247). He has a wealth of experience with innovative projects in government, in business and in civil society organisations and in international development.