

CAN IMPROV CHANGE A COMPANY'S FUTURE?

In today's rapidly changing world, companies with a growth mindset are increasingly searching for new ways to address challenges, and new ways of thinking altogether. The answer may lie in a concept introduced more than fifty years ago.

Lateral Thinking, a term coined by psychologist Edward de Bono in 1967, is a problem-solving approach that encourages going beyond traditional, linear methods. De Bono, renowned for his work on creative thinking and author of *Six Thinking Hats*, emphasized that unconventional approaches can unlock innovation. Instead of relying solely on logical, step-by-step reasoning (known as vertical thinking), lateral thinking fosters exploration of unusual ideas and multiple perspectives.

Vertical thinking, in contrast, is reason-based. It gathers all available data and progresses sequentially until a logical conclusion is reached. While effective, it often reinforces predictable outcomes.

Though not labeled as such by de Bono, lateral thinking can also be viewed as **improvisational thinking**. Much like improv theater, which begins with a single idea and evolves unpredictably, lateral thinking starts with a spark and develops into solutions that even the creators may not have anticipated.

THE DIFFERENCES

Linear Thinking

- Follows a logical, step-by-step process
- Focuses on direct, predictable outcomes
- Relies on established methods and processes
- Best suited for routine or well-defined problems

Lateral Thinking

- Encourages creative, non-traditional approaches—the “what ifs” and the “why nots”
- Explores multiple perspectives and unconventional solutions
- Breaks away from predictable reasoning
- Ideal for solving complex or innovative challenges

Lateral thinking blends imagination with intuition. It encourages generating ideas beyond existing knowledge and postpones judgment on outcomes. By reframing challenges and exploring them from different angles, organizations can open the door to more diverse and effective results.

WHY CONSIDER LATERAL THINKING

Lateral thinking can be applied in both business and personal contexts—from corporate problem-solving to major life decisions like career moves or relocations.

In a business environment, however, the approach is not without challenges. It is difficult, time-consuming, messy, and often initially unproductive. **Adoption requires patience, commitment, and a willingness to embrace discomfort.**

Yet for organizations determined to stay ahead of the curve, the payoff is significant. Lateral thinking increases adaptability and fuels innovation in environments where technology, markets, and strategies evolve at breakneck speed. **It equips companies to not only respond to change but to create it.**

Adoption does not need to happen enterprise-wide overnight. Starting with one department, team, or pilot group allows organizations to refine the approach, learn from successes and setbacks, and build internal champions.

The first step: **management must give permission to dream big.** Teams should be encouraged to think outside the box, speak freely, and feel safe proposing even “out there” ideas. This does not mean implementing every suggestion—it means creating a culture where creativity is welcomed and explored.

LATERAL THINKING TECHNIQUES

1. **Recognize thought patterns**
Avoid anchoring bias by questioning default reasoning and actively exploring alternative paths.
2. **Ask why**
Challenge conventions—even when processes appear to work well—to uncover hidden opportunities.
3. **Consider all alternatives**
Set aside the “best” answer at first and deliberately explore multiple, even lofty, options.
4. **Invite external stimuli**
Rearrange teams, encourage cross-department brainstorming, and introduce fresh perspectives.
5. **Reframe ideas**
Revisit seemingly impractical ideas, adjust constraints, and explore reformulations.
6. **Try random entry**
Introduce random words, images, or concepts to spark unexpected associations.
7. **Mind mapping**
Visualize complex problems to see relationships, generate connections, and prevent disorganized thinking.

THE BENEFITS OF LATERAL THINKING

- **Generates fresh ideas:** Wild concepts, once refined, can lead to breakthrough solutions.
- **Challenges assumptions:** Encourages self-awareness and reduces reliance on limiting biases.
- **Builds new ways of thinking:** Develops creative approaches that extend beyond problem-solving.
- **Expands focus:** Breaks problems into parts for deeper exploration and better solutions.
- **Creates alternatives:** Challenges “the way it’s always been done” and identifies better methods.

WHY INTRODUCE LATERAL THINKING

The ultimate goal of adopting lateral thinking is to **dream big and grow.** It shifts focus from merely fixing what is broken to continuously improving what already works.

By unlocking minds and expanding perspectives, organizations position themselves not only to stay ahead of change but to drive it.

At BASG, we specialize in helping companies thrive through innovation and improvement. Our expertise spans **Process Improvement, Change Management, Customer and Employee Experience, and Training Facilitation.**