Clear and Creative Thinking

Your Key to Working Smarter

Herb Kindler, Ph.D.

A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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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 the user to the core issues covered in this book.

**THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK ARE TO HELP THE USER:**

1) Learn clear thinking can open the reader’s mind to new ways of looking at problems and opportunities

2) Explore creative and analytical techniques for generating fresh possibilities

3) Understand the role that values, culture, and goals have in resolving an issue successfully

4) Understand and select appropriate strategies for implementing decisions

**ASSESSING PROGRESS**

NETg 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 download the assessment and answer key, go to www.courseilt.com and search on the book title, or call 1-800-442-7477.

*Assessments should not be used in any employee selection process.*
About the Author

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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.
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
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 kaisen.

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incremental</th>
<th>Transformational</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works within the current system</td>
<td>Replaces established framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-by-step improvements</td>
<td>A different way of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in degrees</td>
<td>Changes in kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More of the same, only better</td>
<td>Challenges assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like working through a maze</td>
<td>Like knocking down walls and rebuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower risk</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
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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?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________
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.